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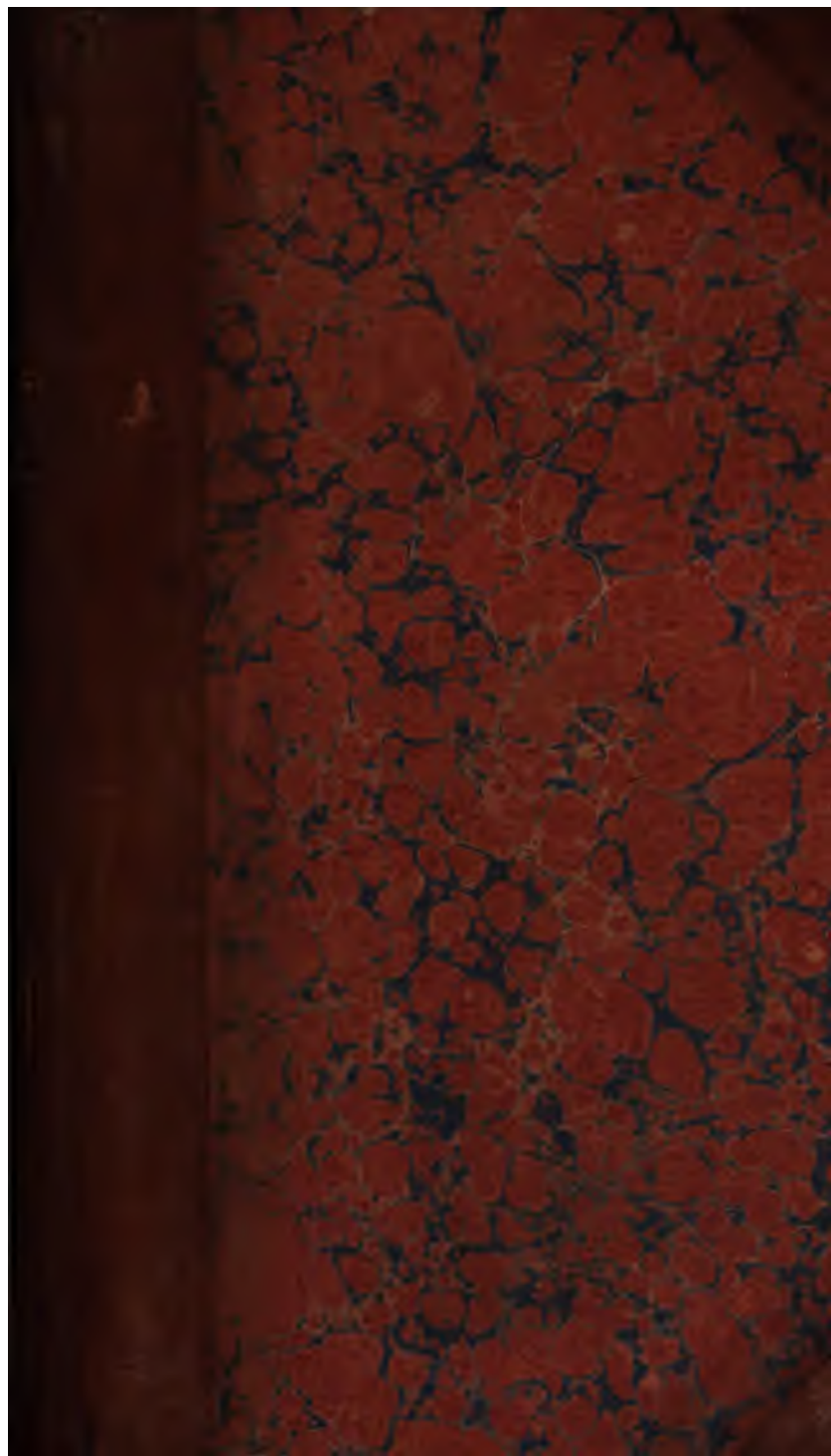
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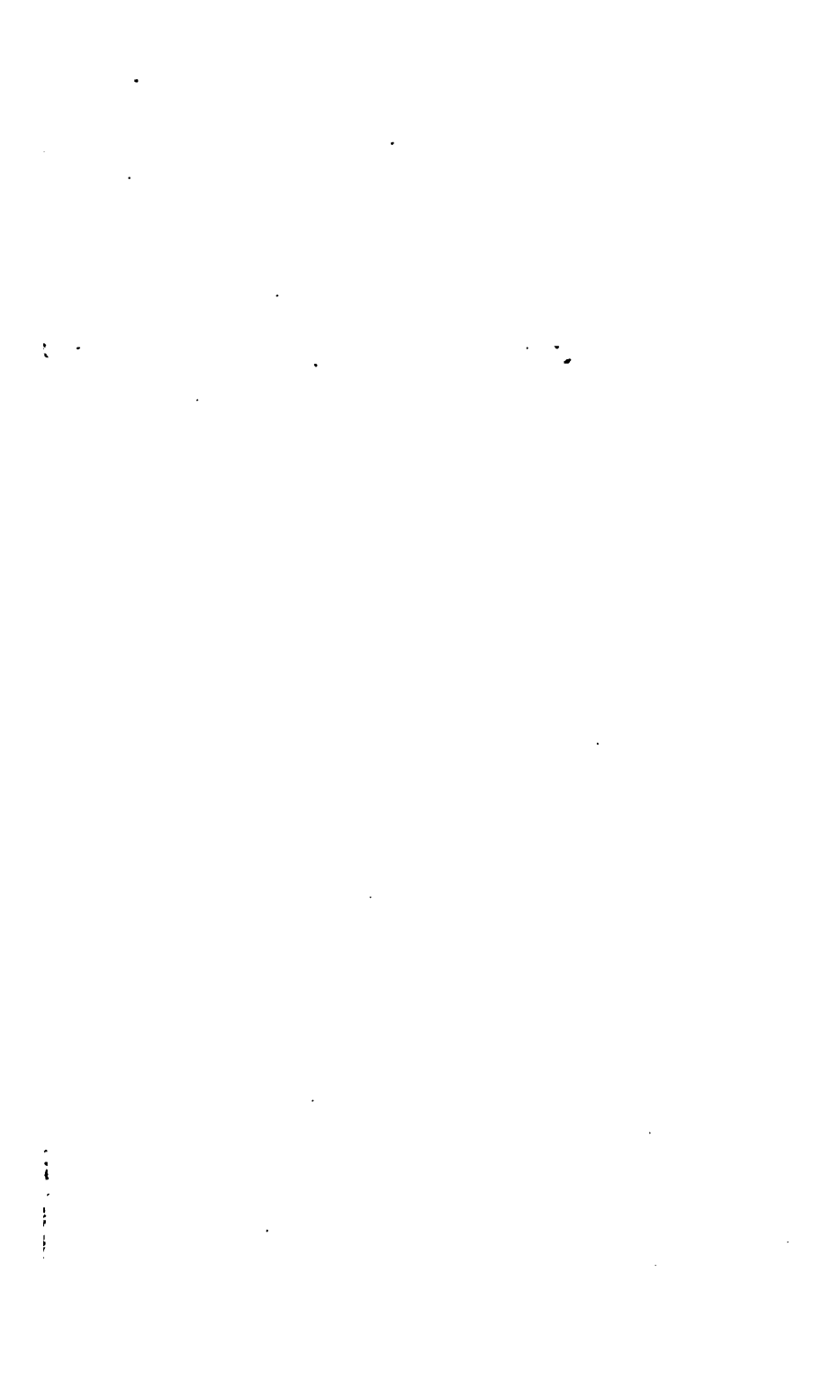


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ARTHUR OF BRITANNY.

VOL. I.

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2. J. H. 1024

ARTHUR OF BRITANNY,

AN

HISTORICAL TALE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE TEMPLARS."

"Young Plantagenet,
Son to the elder brother of this John,
And king o'er him and all that he enjoys."
King John.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
WHITTAKER, TREACHER, & Co.
AVE-MARIA-LANE.

1831.

187.



ERRATA TO VOL. I.

Page 191, 7 lines from top, *dele* "he."

— 227, 7 ditto from bottom, for "nor," read *or*.

— 274, 2 ditto ditto, after "paused," *dele* "he."

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PREFACE.

As it may be objected to the construction of this book, that it is of too modern a cast for the times in which the plot is laid, it may perhaps be useful to premise—though such a conclusion would probably appear to the most careless inquirer—that even had it been practicable to have sketched the exact language and allusions of a period so long passed by, so far from the story being thereby rendered more interesting, it would, to the gene-

rality of readers, have been unintelligible. Obsolete as are the writings of our ancient Chaucer to the present generation, such a production would have scarcely been less so to the age in which he lived.

If therefore the propriety of any departure from the actual fact be conceded, the degree of such deviation will perhaps be as much a matter of taste, as of more serious criticism.

“ It is necessary,” says Sir Walter Scott, in his Dedication to *Ivanhoe*, “ for exciting interest of any kind, that the subject assumed should be, as it were, translated into the manners and language of the age we live in. The same motive which prevents my writing the dialogue of the piece in Anglo-Saxon or in Norman-French, and which prohibits my sending forth to the public this essay, printed with the types of Caxton, or Wynken de Worde; prevents my attempting to confine myself within the limits of the period in which my story is laid.”

Such is the authority upon which the Author has proceeded, in the composition of the following pages ; and if, in the attempt to add to the attractiveness of the incidents, by so "translating" them into the feelings of the present day, he should be thought to have exceeded the license which such a mode of reasoning seems to give him, he trusts, should he, in any respect, have accomplished his purpose, that any apparent neglect of the claims of antiquity will be willingly excused, for the greater interest of which, by such a course, he has been able to avail himself.

The object he has sought has been to amuse : if that end be attained, as far as his own views extend, he is content.

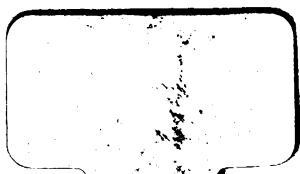
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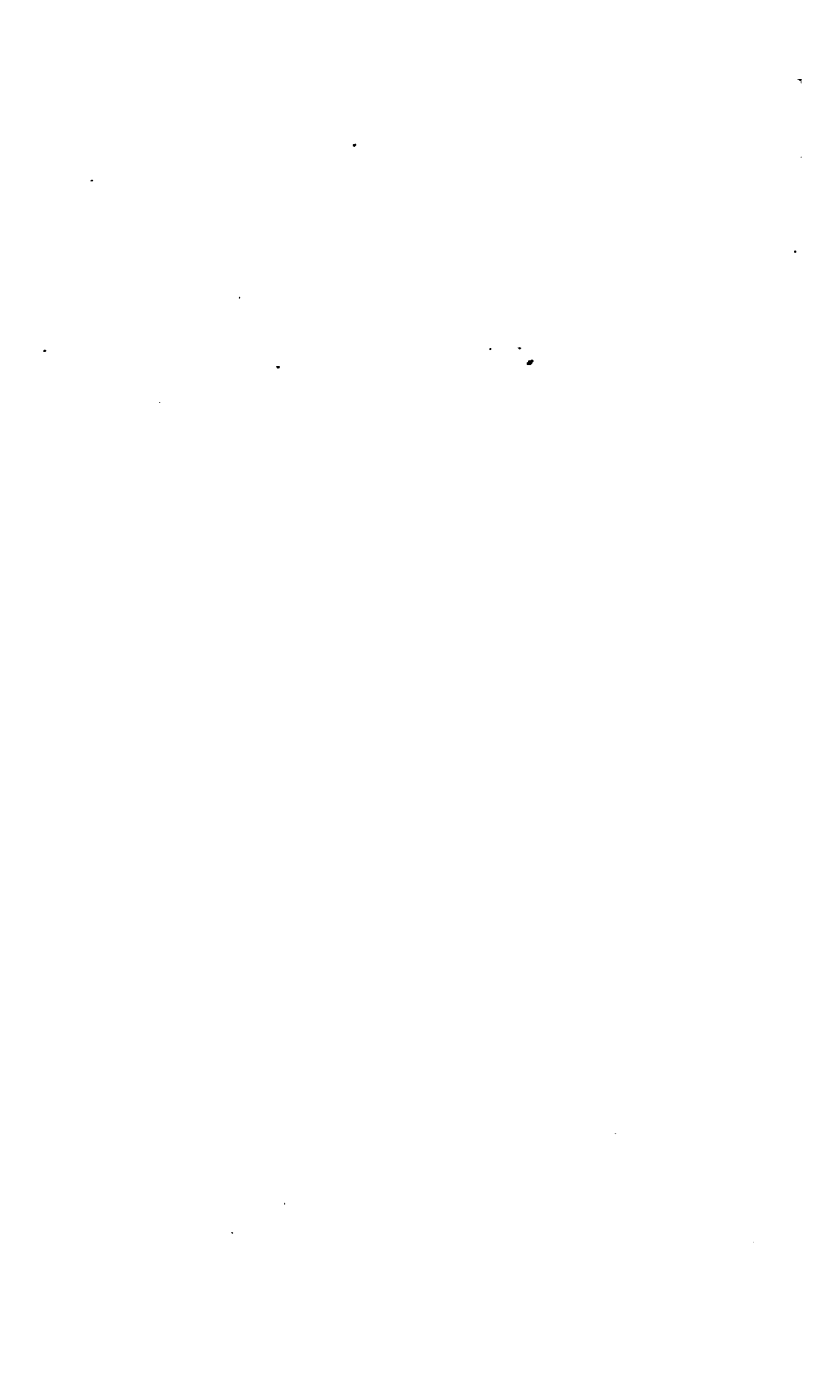


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ARTHUR OF BRITANNY.



VOL. I.

He stood still, and gazing anxiously on the broad sea before him, strained his eyes through the increasing darkness as if he would have pierced beyond the farthest horizon—he stooped down, and, placing his ear in close contact with the water's edge, sought to catch those faint distant sounds, that would otherwise have been lost to him ; but it seemed a fruitless attempt.

The tide came steadily in, as if it but mocked his impatience, again and again obliging him to retire, until at length one single rock alone remained below the carious cliffs, and he stood on it firm and immovable ; as if the interest which kept him there absorbed the very knowledge of the rushing sea, that each moment gathered around him, or that knowing the highest mark of the tide, he there awaited its approach in assured safety.

Still did the mighty deep swell onward, and soon were the watcher's feet buried in its waves ; but he seemed not to regard, scarcely to be aware of its progress, for the intense thought

that engrossed him; he moved not, save when the playful breeze, mocking him with some fancied sound, caused him again to stoop down and seek to assure himself of the wished-for reality. The waves had now covered his knees, still he regarded them not—they then paused, hesitating for some few moments in their everlasting motion, and then, obeying that omnipotent law, which has given them bounds which they cannot pass, fettering them with such undeviating exactness, that the limited power of human science can trace their path for the past, the present, or for thousands of after ages, they silently returned—the tide had ebbed.

But that solitary watcher cared not—perhaps was unconscious of the ocean's march—lost to every thing save his own deep purpose. Again and again did he repeat his eager scrutiny, and seek to catch the expected signal with increased and increasing impatience.

But still no better result answered his anxious watch; and at length yielding to his impatience,

he had almost relinquished the very expectation of success, and was now actually listening for the last time, when his quick ear caught some far distant sound, as it came faintly o'er the glassy sea; and in the full conviction that it was none other than that for which he waited, he continued stooping down to assure himself of its certainty.

Not many moments passed away ere he hastily arose, and scrambling up the cliffs, sought a more elevated station. With intensest interest did he gaze through the now fainting moonlight, until at length on the silvery streak that played upon the waves, a small dark object was clearly visible: his eyes continued fixed upon it—it came nearer and nearer, and he could now plainly distinguish it to be a boat fastly making for the land. Now some secret signal seemed to reach him—he sprung down to the shore, and hastily passing along the creek, was soon lost in its windings.

Not many moments had elapsed when a

bright beacon blazed for an instant on the summit of the cliffs, spreading its rays to the farthest distance ; and then, quick almost as thought, did a faint blue light, like a falling star, sparkle on the sea, and as briefly vanish.

The distant tread of horses next was heard : they approached nearer and nearer, until now they had arrived within a stone's throw of the bay ; then that sound ceased, all was again still, and again did that same solitary figure stand alone upon the shore.

The dark dim object, had now become a large open boat, whose sails bespoke no English build ; stoutly was it rowed, and bravely did it come against the ebbing tide, until it reached within a short distance of the shore, when the oars were suddenly drawn up, and it stayed as if for further scrutiny.

A faint whistle was heard ; it was quickly and loudly answered, and seemed to give assurance to proceed ; as the same moment, the boat

was again moving still closer to the water's edge.

Ere however it touched the beach, it again stayed, a plunge was heard, and a youth in sailor's garb came swimming through the tide, and soon stood upon the land.

He warmly greeted the anxious watcher, impatiently demanding, "Is all right, good Hubert?"

"All, save the ebbing tide," was the laconic answer.

"'Tis no fault of ours," rejoined the youth, "we have been becalmed—the slumbering breeze but mocked our anxiety."

"Then let us make good the past," briefly replied the warrior, "by improving the present—where is thy companion?"

The youth turned round, and, beckoning with his hand, the boat again moved forwards and soon grounded on the beach. A youth, almost the counterpart of him who waited for

him, stood on its prow ; he was alike habited in a sailor's dress, and though less robust in form— younger, too, in years—perhaps gentler in manners—there was a loftiness about his carriage that bespoke him nobly, if not princely born ; and the fire of his black, sparkling eye well proclaimed the high-swelling soul that animated him to sublimest deeds. He gazed fixedly before him, as if sunk in deep and sad reflection ; still clung to the mast, against which he leaned, as if it were the stay of his happiness, the assurance of his safety, nor heeded his companion's oft-repeated intreaties to descend : but the weakness of that moment soon passed away—a better hope seemed to rouse him into renewed confidence ; and, shaking off that sadness, he at once sprung upon the shore. His footing had been insecure—he fell ; but little did that ill-omened incident *now* daunt him ; his hands instinctively grasped the sands on which he lay, and, springing on his feet, he exultingly exclaimed,

"Thus, England, do I seize thee as my right—may the God of Justice defend that right."

"Amen," impetuously responded his companion, "amen! Worthy, indeed, art thou of England's pride, of her proudest honours; and well shalt thou achieve the work of difficulty that awaits thee."

He took his hand, and leading him to the warrior, who had retired some paces up the shore, presented him to him.

"This, Hubert, is your companion, now only known as your son, Albert de Bourgh, hereafter, God willing, one who may be able to return your zeal and faithfulness with ——"

"Enough, enough," interrupted the warrior, "'tis not for reward that I devote myself to the cause; a far nobler purpose eggs me on—to crush the fell usurper's power, to thwart his unnatural cruelty, and place her lawful heir on England's throne, so basely withheld from him—such a blessed consummation would

bring with it its own reward, and one far more contenting than the highest dignities."

"Thanks, thanks, good Hubert," exclaimed the youth, with much emotion, "'tis a poor acknowledgment, but it is all I can now give you."

"And with it," answered the warrior, "I am satisfied—rest content that Hubert de Bourgh will well do his duty to this child of his adoption; even with his life will he ensure his safety; and when the poor boy Albert shall have become—but hist! the signal—you are called."

A shrill whistle from the boat reminded them of the urgency of a prompt return. Both the young men started; the elder one instantly prepared to obey the summons, but the younger, whose conflicting emotions had before kept him mute, and now were beyond his power to control, sprung into his companion's arms, and in that close embrace sought to conceal the weakness which he could not repress.

Not for many minutes did his supporter dare to trust himself to speak, so entirely had

that unlooked-for action overpowered his self-possession, and it was with no firm voice that he at length entreated of the impatient veteran,

“ But a few minutes, good De Bourgh—however few, they must be ours, and then—we submit.”

Severe indeed was their distress—so severe that even the hardy warrior felt it—his impatience at once passed away, and willing to incur any risk sooner than deny so small a boon, he turned down the shore and left them to themselves.

Oh ! how searching were the feelings which pervaded that secret conference, what anguish in that bitter separation to which they were doomed—words, indeed, there were but few, for it was an emotion too deep for language, but there was an eloquence in their silence and in those deep breathings that spoke more than words, an assurance in that close communion, that declared more than any language—it was as if their whole souls, their whole existence

had been knit into that one embrace—that all else was wretchedness.

Again and again had the summons of the seamen been repeated and neglected ; again and again had the kind-hearted warrior approached to separate them, and yielding to his pity, retired without even attempting his purpose ; the tide was ebbing fast, and each moment increased the difficulty of re-embarking ; daylight dawned, and the sailors, unwilling any longer to risk their own safety, were pushing from the shore ; ere the elder youth broke from his companion, and wringing the old veteran's hand as he rushed by him, passionately exclaimed—

“To thy care, Hubert, and to God—” his emotion choked him—he could not speak—for one moment did he strive to utter those unfinished words, and then bursting from him, he dashed through the waves and sprung into the boat.

Quickly did it glide away, further and fur-

ther did it recede ; now the waving hand that still lingered its last adieu was no longer visible—the boat itself now again dwindled into a dim, indistinct object—was now almost lost in the hazy distance.

Not for one moment did those young eyes that were left withdraw their gaze from that object of so intense interest, as if afraid, once withdrawn, they should not again regain it: even when it had indeed vanished in the morning mists did they still gaze—but on what did they then look?—did the strained sight actually retain that which was lost to all other eyes, or was it imagination alone that marked the spot where it had been?

But it was gone, and as his eyes fell from that gaze, and he looked around him and found himself on a strange land, left to the care of a stranger—separated from all he loved—long and deep was the sigh that burst from him—bitter was his soul as bitterness itself. But he yielded not to his sadness, other and

more animating thoughts chased away despondency, and the high purpose of his coming, and the towering height to which he looked—and what was still sweeter, that dearest hope of his heart, his early and happy reunion with those he loved, cheered him even in that trying hour of separation, and raised him from sadness to renewed vigour. Not long had been that unwonted weakness, when turning to his new protector, he exclaimed in a firm, it almost seemed a cheerful voice—

“Lead on, good father—I am ready.”

He hastily threw over him the dark cloth mantle, which De Bourgh, rather for concealment than for any other protection, had provided, sprung upon his steed, if not with the agility which in those times of martial exercises was so universal with every one of gentle birth, most certainly with the resolution of a determined mind ; and, following the direction of his guide, was soon, by secret and unfrequented paths, moving rapidly from the coast.

CHAPTER II.

“Doth not the crown of England prove the king?”

King John.

UPON the sudden and premature death of Richard Cœur de Lion, the First of England, the throne was, in despite of the claim of Prince Arthur, his elder brother's son, forcibly seized upon by his uncle John; a prince of mean understanding and debased passions, in whom indeed it would be difficult to trace one redeeming goodness to snatch him from deserved abhorrence, and the least revolting feature in whose character was the deceit and cunning

with which he could gloss over his vices, and robing himself with the semblance of virtue, cheat even conviction of its belief of his villainess. He was a man beyond the power of any one generous emotion, as if cruelty and ingratitude were the very spirit that formed his existence.

To his father he had been worse than a traitor, and had repaid that guilty fondness and partiality, which parents so often unjustly place, and which his father had so decidedly bestowed upon him, with the basest ingratitude, with treason and rebellion ; at the very moment that his crafty subtlety had wormed into that father's heart, and amid the monstrous disaffection of the rest of his children, he comforted himself in the assured kindness and attachment of this his favourite. Even when the deceptive mask was torn away, and the broken-hearted parent, beholding the accursed fact, that his darling son, the fancied stay of his declining age, was enlisted against him in his brother's

horrible revolt, cursed them both and died, not even then did one compunctuous visiting touch his callous heart.

His behaviour to his brother was almost as execrable. Richard had sought to mitigate his remorse for his own unnatural conduct to his parent by his kindness to his brother ; he had enriched him even to a profuseness of liberality, had given him power, wealth, possessions, and thought to gain his heart by the weight of favour, and attach him to his interest by the strong tie of gratitude, a tie so strong that even the basest among men have scarcely dared to deny its claims.

But the heartless John was beyond all feeling—the very idea of gratitude was unknown to him ; he not only overlooked his brother's kindness, but even attempted to turn it to his injury, seeking to wrong him by the very power with which he had invested him ; and no sooner had Richard, burning with the ardour of the times, and foregoing friends—coun-

try—throne—for the sacred cause of the cross, sailed for Palestine, than his crafty policy began its work. He strove to withdraw his subjects from their allegiance; entered into a league with his bitterest enemy, enabling the French King through his influence to possess himself of many valuable fortresses; secretly sought to continue King Richard's captivity; and still not satisfied with his villany, actually attempted to wrest by force his brother's crown and sovereignty.

And then, as if his conduct was yet not sufficiently base, and his character odious, finding himself foiled in his purposes, and dreading through Richard's return the certain consequences of his treachery, he at once deserted his ally; and after glutting his reckless soul with a deed of barbarous ferocity, and breaking through every sacred law of hospitality and humanity, by massacring in cold blood, at his very board, the unarmed, trusting guests whom for that very purpose he had there invited, he

threw himself at his brother's feet, and with every seeming contrition and penitence implored his forgiveness.

If the accursing feature in John's character was ingratitude, the atoning one of Richard's was generosity. In spite of his resentment, and the unbending pride which stained its better features, and by its rage had driven him into open rebellion against an indulgent and doting parent, if generosity and frankness could redeem the fault, it was amply done: he at once forgave the worthless traitor, and the only punishment he awarded his crimes was the reproach of his own conscience.

But John felt not that—whatever his weakness, there was none of conscience—that was as callous as his heart.

Richard's early death, however, left not the traitor opportunity to repeat his treason against him. But that event opened a new and a wide field for his ruthless practices.

The heir to the throne was a mere boy,

unknown in deeds, and offered not such an obstacle to his ambition as the lion-hearted Richard, whose very name was an host. At once did he improve the occasion, and having secured the transmarine territories of the crown through the co-operation of the queen-mother, who hated and feared Constantia, the mother of the young prince, for her acknowledged superiority, he hastened to England, and asserted his claim to the throne.

Too well were his schemes laid, and too many, even among the members of the government itself, were his partisans to save the right of the absent heir; the barons, on whom then almost entirely hung the country's destiny, were soon secured, and almost without a struggle did the usurper find himself the acknowledged King of England.

Success at times attends the feeblest means—weakness overcomes strength—it may be from those casual accidents against which no wisdom or valour can provide. Such accidents enabled

John to withstand the league which his usurpation instantly raised against him, and an equally unlooked-for event seemed to seat him securely on the throne.

The Princess Constantia became alarmed at the intriguing conduct of the French king, the leader of the confederacy, who had indeed entered into her views almost solely to embarrass John, and dismember his kingdom, and whose operations evidently consulted his own interests to the neglect, if not prejudice, of those of her son.

This princess was a woman of acute and deep penetration, and of high unyielding spirit, although her maternal fears and the extreme difficulty of her situation too often biassed her better judgment. She had been married at an early age to Geoffrey, the elder brother of John, a prince, if possible, of even more depraved character; who, terminating a dishonoured life before young Arthur's birth, left his widow free to bring up the young prince without the

bane of his base influence. And well had she performed her duty ; for the son was the very opposite of the father's character, brave, noble, generous—eminently did he repay her care, and he became the comfort of her life, the pride of her house, the hope of her destiny—it might indeed be said that she had no existence but in him.

No sooner then did she detect Philip's selfish policy—his previous warm assurances, added to the apparent desire of continuing their good feeling, which his first proceedings so strongly indicated, had for a time deceived her—than yielding to her fears, and hoping thereby to preserve at least her paternal territories, she secretly quitted the French court, and fleeing with her children to their uncle, placed them under his protection.

This unlooked-for fortune confirmed the usurper upon his throne ; his nephew was left in possession of his mother's dominions, and, as the Duke of Brittany, and secure under his

control, seemed little likely again, to disturb him. King Philip was constrained to an instant peace; and, as if still further to assure his security, was glad to terminate their discords by an alliance with John's family. Thus did the conflicting passions of others become strength to his weakness, and their jealousies and fears induce those results, which his pusillanimity never would have obtained.

But that ruthless cruelty which so universally directed his actions, that utter disregard of feeling, that bursting asunder of every tie of God and man, in which he might be said to have delighted, could not long be inoperative. Freed from that first danger from his influence, his coward soul soon pictured to itself fresh peril, and he sought to guard against the possibility of all future risk, by detaining the young Prince a close prisoner—strove to break his high spirit by neglect and indignity—basely separated him from his mother, for he too was afraid of her—debarred him from all suitable

companions, and spared no ingenuity of cruelty to bring about a result, which policy and not feeling prevented his securing by violent means.

But Prince Arthur was no common youth; young as he still was, he had a mind far above his years—a soul above such merciless barbarity. Soon did he understand his uncle and detect his intention, and his indignation was strength and energy to him; nor did he lack wisdom to conceal his knowledge that he might better counteract his evil purposes, and escape the dangers which surrounded him, and like the greedy hawk hovering over its prey, but waited the favourable moment to pounce upon the victim.

Time went on: he had now attained to man's estate; his frank and open manners had gained him friends even among his enemies, and the very companions of that his imprisonment became his partisans—nay, it was through the aid of his very guards, that after many

fruitless attempts, he at length succeeded in escaping from his captivity.

He at once fled to King Philip, his former protector, then in league with the revolted barons and at war with John ; and, entering into the French army, sought to curb his uncle's power, and gain himself a name worthy of his birth.

That monarch received him with more than pleasure, for well did his presence aid his projects and almost insure their success ; nay, he went further : former experience had told him how frail was his hold upon the young prince's adherence, and that he could only hope to attach him to himself by actually furthering his interests. Sincerely to have done this, would have been directly to oppose his own views, but the intriguing monarch was at no great trouble to devise expedients for all the difficulties which seemed to thwart him. A childish fondness had existed between the young prince and his daughter Marie—a princess of

great beauty, and whose mind was noble as her birth—which it wanted but little opportunity to mature into a deeper emotion. It is perhaps seldom—it certainly in those times was almost a miracle—that any feeling beyond that of mere state-policy influences the marriages of princes; but the attachment which existed between these young hearts was as sincere as truth—as firm as confidence—as fervent as devotedness could make it, and the crafty monarch chuckled in the certain success of his extremest wishes.

A daughter indeed under any circumstances, however ill-assorted the match, would have been a small price to have secured the advancement of his designs: he caused their instant espousals, and thereby obtained a father's influence over the prince, gave himself an interest in his claims, and made his success the aggrandisement of his own family.

Backed by such an array of real right, and asserted wrongs, and secure, beyond even fear,

of the extreme advantages which that alliance had given him, Philip prosecuted his schemes with vigour and success; and the infatuated John, who, in place of binding his turbulent barons around him by kindness and moderation, had already by the basest deceit and attempted wrong, incited them to open rebellion, soon tottered on his ill-gotten throne.

Not content with carrying off the betrothed wife of the Count de la Marche, one of the most powerful of the Norman barons, and espousing her in spite both of his own and her previous marriage, he even added to the commotions which that nobleman in revenge had excited against him, by violence and injustice, deprived the nobles of their privileges, insulted their strongest feelings by retaining the basest miscreants as the champions of his courts, and treated their complaints with insolence and falsehood.

Such were the causes which had arrayed against him a combination, at which his dea-

tard spirit quailed for fear. At home, turbulence and anarchy and the very strength of his throne turned against him, surrounded by secret enemies and known foes, traitors in his very family, and detestation almost every where; abroad, a powerful monarch in league with his rebellious subjects, and supported, not only by the just claims of the lawful heir to the throne, but by that prince's renown—the renown of his valour, the admiration of his military enterprize, the charms of his noble carriage and manly form, and pity for his wrongs; with no resource within himself, but a dastard, trembling soul to conjure up unreal dangers, and add to the actual perils that beset him by the worse fancies of cowardice. Such a combination of events would have destroyed almost any other man; but there was a recklessness about John, an indolence of feeling, that saved him, a levity, that laughed at fear and sported with destruction as long as it was not present, and then left him a prey to abjectest terror, without

the power even to stand up against its approach.

Success had accompanied the first efforts of the combined army ; victory had followed after victory, and the campaign already promised the most important results. The usurper was alarmed, and in vain sought to arrest the progress of his enemies by repeated offers of concession ; but Philip, aware of the advantages of his position, refused to listen to any terms but such as even John's coward soul rejected, and with even more effective force prepared to prosecute the war.

It was at this period of intervening repose, if that could be called repose which was the mere pause of exhaustion to provide the means of prosecuting the struggle with increased vigour, that John, as if callous to his dangers, and careless of all consequences, abandoned himself to sloth and intemperance, and sought to drown the very thought of peril in the depth of sensual gratifications. Imperfect, indeed, was

that attempted ignorance : in the very midst of his wildest debaucheries would the smothered reality stalk before him, and his trembling soul sicken at the extremity of his condition : he gave himself to dark suspicion, and his jaundiced eye lowered upon all with doubt and jealousy ; there was not one human being whom he could trust—nay, even his own mother, to whom he owed his crown, and through whose vigour and address alone he still held it, escaped not that universal distrust, and believing himself to be the mere tool of her ambition—the state puppet, through the mockery of whose sceptre she in reality ruled the land, he hated even her, and but for his fears, and the appalling sense of his weakness, would have gladly sacrificed her to his jealousy.

Still were the further operations of his enemies delayed, and John, unable to fathom so unlooked-for a pause, or even to content himself with any fancied explanation, became daily more peevish and impatient, and in the same

ratio sought to dissipate his apprehensions by still greater excesses. Surrounded by bravos, whose exorbitant pay assured him of their fidelity, the tyrant feared not the assassin's blow, nor scrupled to mingle in the promiscuous assemblies of the people, and thereby gain through the infallible evidence of his own senses, the knowledge how universally he was execrated: and many were the unsuspecting victims who bled for words uttered in the mere idleness of the moment; for the royal murderer valued not human life, nor often hesitated to destroy it, when convenience or passion asked its sacrifice.

Such was then the condition of this ill-fated land; no man was secure either of life or property—for to be rich was a crime, and without the power to preserve it, wealth but added to the risk of its possessor; the husbandman tilled not the land, for he knew not who should reap the fruits of his labour; the merchant cared not to risk what little he might already possess,

on a tide of so uncertain affairs—a tide to which the turbulence of a tempestuous ocean was as peace ; all was confusion, and men existed from day to day in the hope that the storm of angry violence might pass, and a fairer, happier morning dawn upon them.

In such a state of things, the business of arms was the only one either followed or held in estimation ; one general system of vassalage maintained throughout the land, the people were at the beck of the barons, the barons as so many sovereigns disposed of them as they pleased, and whether in civil feuds and angry violence against each other, or for the national good and to further the ambitious projects of their kings, their services were ever at their command. Secure therefore of the barons, the sovereign had at his control the whole strength of his people ; deprived of his nobles' aid, he was left to the mercenary co-operation of the Brabançons and other foreign adventu-

ers, men who, in those days of blood and violence, hired out their services wherever the best pay was offered them, and who now formed the main bulk and chief stay of John's army ; for John, although he compelled some to their duty, and severely fined others of his refractory barons for their non-attendance on his summons, sensibly felt how little dependence he could place in such a force, nor trusted much to their assistance.

His devious policy rather sought to weaken their power by continuing their existing feuds, and fomenting afresh the deadly animosities which the haughty insolence of his Norman, and the deep hatred and revenge of his Saxon subjects too readily brought into fatal operation, and so find help to his government in the very waste of the nation's strength.

Successful, however, as such a king might consider the certain result of such a policy, there was another result which either his want

of discrimination permitted him not to foresee, or his indolence and weakness failed to counteract. Men became disgusted with his imbecility, at the same time that they detested his cruelty ; they naturally looked for some one to deliver them from the rule of the hated usurper ; and their rightful sovereign, the Duke of Brittany, who, in addition to every claim of birth, had already, young as he was, gained no mean celebrity by his earliest deeds, each day obtained increased interest in the hearts of all thinking men ; and to him did the nation look as the hope of happier times—the promise of peace and security. They hailed the present success of the combined arms with delight, and saw in the strenuous provision for further exertions, a certainty of the ultimate accomplishment of their wishes. Nor did they fail to discern in the brooding calm which for the time hung over their proceedings, an assurance of a far deeper purpose than was allowed to appear ; so that the mystery, which to the tyrant was so

bitter torment, to them was content and satisfaction.

Having thus briefly detailed the existing state of things at the period of which we are writing, we return to our travellers.

CHAPTER III.

—“Happiness is youth’s prerogative,
The dancing day-star of life’s opening morn ;
The star, the beauteous star, benignant smiles,
Though after hours bring on rain and whirlwind.”

Translation from Nicolini.

DE BOURGH rode quickly forwards, followed at some paces distance by his young companion, nor suffered his horse to slacken his speed until broad daylight and the opening glades of the forest, through which their journey had so far laid, seemed to increase materially their risk of observation.

So far he had moved on in silence, hurrying through the intricate tracts of the forest, as if

it had been one of the Roman streets along which they passed, rather than a wild and almost impervious wood ; now, however, he suddenly drew up, and after minutely scanning the trees before him for a moment or two, at once alighted from his steed, and beckoning to his companion to imitate his example, passed into the densest thicket, leading his horse after him.

Albert silently followed his injunction, his trust in his guide preventing almost the wish to demand his purpose. It soon, however, plainly and satisfactorily enough appeared. At not many paces, De Bourgh halted, and, tying up his own and the youth's steed under the branching shade of an ancient oak, he pushed aside a few brambles at his feet, and exposed to view a large opening in the ground, at the same time breaking their long silence with the inquiry,

“Wottest thou, my son, that thy recruiting was so near?”

“Recruiting, good father?” demanded the youth in return, “burying, methinks.”

"'Tis not the best looking hostelries that give the best cheer," rejoined De Bourgh, "good wine will drink well e'en out of the meanest cup."

"By my halidome," returned the youth, "be the refection good, I care little how it is served," and, as he spoke, he jumped into the aperture.

Guided by De Bourgh, he passed along a roomy vault, and at a few paces felt (for in the sudden transition from the light, he could not, in its subterranean darkness, see), that he had entered a spacious cavern. Notwithstanding his declared indifference, it is perhaps doubtful how any long tarrying in this unsatisfying darkness might have affected him; De Bourgh, however, gave him not much leisure for any such surmises; he quickly struck a light, and discovered to the astonished youth, as if it were a lofty and extensive hall, somewhat gloomy indeed—perhaps, at first sight, sufficiently gloomy, notwithstanding the formidable party and well-

filled flagon, which graced a board by which he stood, and seemed to coax his hunger and exhaustion into a better estimate of his lodgment.

Albert looked round to his protector for some account of their strange hostelry: it was soon given, for in fact, it was more his ignorance, than the rarity of such places of refuge, that gave rise to his astonishment. It was, indeed, but one of the many excavations provided by the ancient Britons, as well, perhaps, for the concealment of themselves and their treasures in the rapacious times in which they lived, as for the safe depositing of their corn in more peaceful times. Many of them, indeed, had been filled up; some, entirely lost sight of as men and ages passed away; and those which still remained, had become either the secret resorts of lawless banditti, or, in some few instances, a valued asylum against the storms and changes which still agitated the land.

Although Albert listened with much attention to De Bourgh's explanation, he did not, however, neglect a due use of the ample cheer, to which his long ride, notwithstanding his present depression, gave no slight zest ; nor, however unusual might be such a dormitory, did he the less enjoy, after a somewhat lengthy conference with De Bourgh, the comfortable bed which his protector, by throwing together some bundles of fresh straw and covering them with his cloak, had quickly prepared.

It was almost evening when De Bourgh awoke him : he rose recruited in mind as well as body, and while his companion got ready their steeds, he hastily exchanged his sea-boy's dress for one more suiting his apparent condition, and was soon prepared to accompany him. Little sign, however, was there now of his late dejection ; the sad tear of separation no longer trembled in his eye, nor did the bitter regret of parted happiness any longer depress his spirits ; but the high goal before him animated him into

cheerfulness—hope spread her fairest sails, and blithely did she carry him along the sea of happiest expectation; his natural spirits had returned in all their vivacity, and youth, that season of joy, that spring of promise, when all is hope, and the yet untutored heart thinks not of sorrow, nor dwells on disappointment, roused him from the inactivity of despondency to the energy of confidence, and active exertion was to him in the place of happiness.

Nature too seemed to smile upon their path, and by the voice of her ten thousand songsters to sing gladness to their hearts. A beautifully sweeping plain was at their feet, along which the wandering Arun sported in endless mazes. Their road lay high on the rising slope, and gave them a far distant view of that garden of the land, beautiful amid violence, luxuriant even in its neglect. The rich evening sun gilded it with a glorious beauty, and the calm serenity of Nature's fastly coming repose shed its soothing influence on the hearts of the

anxious wanderers, and for the time beguiled them of their cares.

“ ’Tis a glorious evening, Hubert,” exclaimed his young companion, interrupting a silence of long continuance. “ Nature seems to woo our admiration with her loveliness, and charm away our discontent by her universal tranquillity ; peace is every where around us, and should we, good father, whatever our griefs, deny her kind intent ? Should man alone, for whose use she is clothed with riches, and radiates joy, fail to be happy, and, refusing her voice of gladness, shrink within the dark gloom of discontent and peevishness ? ”

“ You speak like a philosopher, Albert,” smilingly returned the veteran, “ and most gladly do I hail the promise of so good a spirit—there is no success to any cause without a hearty zeal attends its pursuit, and no zeal is effective but such as starts the race with the certain belief of its happy termination.”

“ Then by such reasoning, Hubert, our pur-

poses should already be achieved, for, so far from feeling one doubt of the full attainment of our wishes, I seem to see no difficulty whatever in its way, as if it were already gained."

Hubert shook his head. "Not so fast, my young friend; although it is my wish, as it is also good policy, rather to animate your zeal by placing before you the brightest hopes, than depress them even by the shadow of a doubt; still it were folly not to admit that there are some difficulties to be surmounted, and which will require wisdom as well as zeal—the cool wisdom of age and experience, as well as the warm impetuosity of youth, to disperse."

"*Doubts* from you, good father, after all your arguments to rouse me from my last night's sadness?"

"Old age, Albert, the frigid caution of grey hairs, looks around with far different vision—perhaps sees objects more severely, but still more truly, than the glowing fancies of youth

permit to its untutored judgment. The one launches forth his bark on an untried sea, and steering unhesitatingly to the haven of his wishes, wrecks his young hopes on the sunken rocks of destruction which lie in his track, or seeing them in time to escape their desolation, wastes his strength in fruitless efforts to proceed, then jaded and dispirited returns to whence he set out, and lessoned by experience begins his course anew; — the other looks warily out, starts with caution at his helm, and piloting skilfully along the more devious, but safer course, which often practice has taught him, surmounts the perils of the inexperienced, and evades the errors of the imprudent.”

“ Still give me youth, good Hubert, and its animating ardour, even if I bruise myself against those rocks of ignorance of which you speak—still leave me the gay noontide of young hope, that inspires the weighted heart almost beyond the knowledge of its sadness, and stimulates weakness until it is almost strength.”

“Still leave thee thy young hopes? poor soul!—would they were ever young, that hope might never be changed into unsatisfying fruition. I will not tell thee, Albert, that in this vain world there is no such a reality, as any of the thousand imaginations which our fancies love to picture, that even success contents not our desires, nor the attainment of our highest wishes brings with it the expected satisfaction. I will not tell thee, beforehand, the ungracious discoveries which disappointed age will one day tell thee, for neither would that knowledge be grateful to thee, nor indeed wouldst thou now listen to my words—rather would I say, enjoy thy youth, revel in thy hope, trust to the fair promises with which thy young imagination lures thee, lose thyself in that dream of bliss, nor care to think that it is but an idle phantasy; and when stern truth approaches, and its harsher voice will be heard above the syren notes wherewith thy fancy cheats thee—then, and not till then, see life as it really is, till

then, bask in thy sweet spring of simplicity, and let ignorance be to thee as happiness—'tis but thy right, Albert, the privilege of this morning of thy existence, and soon enough wilt thou learn what life really is."

"Alas ! good father, already have I known disappointment, most cruelty felt injustice and wrong—but yet I think not on them, save indeed how to overcome them—I dwell not on troubles, but look only on the bright side of things. I think, Hubert, there must be a bright view, as well as a dark one, that somewhat biasses our estimate of life, and I would fain hope that your's is the dark one."

"It is possible, Albert, and yet at your age my hopes were little less sanguine."

"Then why, Hubert, now draw so sad a picture of life? Few men I believe have passed through it with greater honour and fairer fame than the good Hubert de Bourgh—you bear honours thick around you—wealth waits upon you—second to none did you stand in King

Richard's regard, the usurper too looks upon you with no mean estimation, and loads you with his favours ; why then should you thus scowl upon an existence that has done so much for you?"

"Merely, Albert, that I have found it to be but vanity, and the world, in which I have passed it, has proved itself baser than it was cruel ; treachery, falsehood, and wrong have seemed to me to rule the bulk of its creatures, and where their 'aspick venom' touched not, the disappointment of fondest hopes, the injury of dearest feelings induced about the same result—like you, Albert, I wished my first better estimate of things to be a continuing one, and wilfully closed my eyes to the obtrusive evidence, that each day my maturing existence learnt of the heartless perfidy around me ; but alas ! it was a futile wish—malice, deceit and villany followed in such rapid succession—I might have closed my eyes to the mid-day sun and denied his existence, but it was impossible

to resist the conviction of the world's utter worthlessness."

"If such, Hubert, indeed be the true estimate of the world, 'tis little use to risk whatever of good we possess, be it never so small, or forego, though for the briefest time, the heart's fond associations—the best, truest happiness that affection gives, for the highest gifts of so despicable a giver. I ought to repent me of this my vain essay, and quickly fly from its pains and perils to a better, surer rest."

"Nay, nay, Albert, your inference, however natural from such premises, is somewhat too extreme; here we are, placed in a world in which however despicable, we must play our part, and every generous soul would wish it well played: believe me I would not repress the young ambition that urges you on, nor damp the ardour that inspirits you; but I would say, take heed, Albert, and though I do not add that you should expect disappointment,

I would caution you, that it may perhaps arrive, that if it do, you may not be altogether cast down."

"'Tis kindly meant, good father, and as such I thank you for the caution. Think not that I do not see the dangers which surround me, but that seeing them, I do not wish the glaring array to shrink my at best but feeble efforts into useless despondency."

"Talk not of despondency, my son ; whatever the bravest courage and devoted hearts can do, shall be done to secure the highest point of our desires : only let caution and prudence direct our efforts and we must succeed. Your part in the struggle, Albert, will have no slight difficulties attending it."

"I think not of them, Hubert ; be they what they may, my mind is braced to meet them, and I will not flinch."

"Nor should you, noble soul ! for zeal such as yours must well surmount them—only remember, one inadvertent step—"

“ I know, good Hubert, I am already well-tutored to the work.”

De Bourgh made no reply, and the travellers proceeded on their way in silence, their quickening speed evidently declaring the absorbing interest of the reflections in which each was lost. Darkness was soon again around them, and covered by its obscurity, they gained a more beaten track, and pushing quickly on, at the end of a few hours found themselves at the village of Ethelwood, at the unpretending hostelry of which place it was purposed that they should again rest.

It was just daybreak when they arrived, and whilst De Bourgh sought accommodation for their horses, his younger companion amused himself by wandering about the place and surveying its neighbourhood. The first object that interested him was the magnificent abbey of St. Etheldreda in its immediate neighbourhood, the beautiful tower of whose chapel was the pride of the surrounding country ; Albert

was struck beyond degree with the romanticity of the prospect, and forgetting alike his fatigue and his guide's probable return, he at once directed his steps towards the abbey, to gain by a nearer position a more satisfying view of its beauties.

He continued for some time to ramble farther and farther round its walls, unmindful of all but the pleasing interest before him ; when, as he was now passing its extensive gardens, his attention was suddenly diverted by the cautious opening of a small postern close by where he stood, and the issuing therefrom of a man in a pilgrim's hat and cloak. He looked cautiously about him, and, not detecting Albert's near proximity through the cover of a tree by which he was standing, turned round and continued in earnest conference with some one within the garden.

Had Albert never before felt curiosity, he must have felt it now ; all circumstances of time and place, the so evident fear of detec-

tion, and the apparent certainty of some sacrilegious attempt upon the holy sisterhood, wrought him up to an excess of desire to learn further. Not doubting that what he had witnessed was the prelude to some daring violation of the sacred walls, he crouched behind the tree, and looking from the other side of it, discovered that the partner of the pious palmer's conference was no less than one of the devout sisterhood themselves—a lovely creature, both young enough and handsome enough to be well worth the imminent peril to which the good man had exposed himself.

But though Albert could so well see them, he could not so readily overhear their conversation; his imagination, however, soon made up the deficiency, and he construed their many words, and the familiar taps given by the good man with such careless freedom, and received by the holy sister with so great content, into an entreaty for another and an early meeting, and he also concluded from the very warm terms of

their parting, that if all was not gained that was desired, enough at least was obtained to continue their former good understanding. That parting over, the fair sister withdrew, the wicket was closed, and the holy man left to continue his way in all the soft remembrances of past satisfactions—or it might be, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, in holier and more spiritual communions.

Albert's convictions seemed, however, to favour the former supposition, and spurred on at once by the excitement which his curiosity had given rise to, and that peculiar delight with which faults of a certain kind are so generally laid hold of, he somewhat harshly interrupted the good man's meditations, as also his retiring step, by the taunting salutation,

“Good morrow, holy pilgrim—I crave thy blessing; the blessing of one from so fair a shrine, and whose vows are paid to so matchless beauty, must surely be effective.”

The palmer looked up—vexation and rage

marked his astonished features ; but that first surprise soon passed away, and all that then remained was the rankling fury which scowled upon its exciter, and seemed as if with a tiger's savageness it would have pounced upon its victim, and cooled its rage in his destruction.

Albert not slightly repented him of having stirred up so foul a spirit, and regarded him for some brief space as if undetermined how to proceed. He was a man of tolerably good stature, of a fair and ruddy countenance, and, but for his curling lip of disdain, and the reckless eye that almost spoke the soul's deceit and rancour, the expression of his features was one to ingratiate rather than offend ; but whatever of favour it might possess had, in the storm of passion that now held him, passed away, and his savage rage seemed almost that of some unearthly fiend ; and Albert promptly decided that his new acquaintance was anything but a desirable acquisition, particularly in such

a secluded spot as that in which it had been made. But it was too late now to retrace his steps; he had begun the race, and he must e'en go on: he looked at him again, the man still scowled upon him, but Albert felt that his worst looks harmed him not, and soon detected that they were not followed up with any attempted violence; he also discovered that he was unarmed, while his own rapier gave him an advantage, of which the good man no doubt had already taken note, and which in all probability had repressed his more active violence.

No sooner had Albert made this discovery, and, weighing his own armed weakness against the palmer's unarmed strength, felt that they met at least on no very unequal terms, than his courage returned, and with it his former purpose of bantering him.

"The pilgrims of the Holy Cross," he continued, "well deserve the sweetest consolations, and, St. Etheldreda be praised for her,

charities, have a right to the kindest benevolence of her votaries—'twere hard indeed to deny any thing to so zealous a devotee."

"Caitiff!" exclaimed the palmer, approaching the youth in a manner, that in spite of himself somewhat awed him, "cease your scoffings, and mind, boy—silence, or—" he significantly motioned with his finger in sign of intimidation.

The first proceeding of Albert on his sudden approach had been to skip somewhat dexterously backward, as if either doubting the correctness of his previous conclusions as to their relative prowess, or that he hesitated to punish the pilgrim's obtrusive anger. He laid hold of his sword indeed and *looked* defiance, but still he drew it not, as if rather preferring to prevent hostilities by the shew of valour, than actually to hurry on the war by any offensive measure: and then, with one foot boldly confronting his antagonist, and the other at some distance in the rear prepared for any further retrograde that

after circumstances might render necessary, he stood irresolute how to proceed.

His quick movement, and so wary hesitation seemed rather to amuse the palmer of his previous rage than tend to any increase of it, and though the expression of his features was scarcely more gracious, it certainly was less marked with anger, as he demanded in an authoritative tone—"Who and what art thou, boy, and wherefore this skulking in my path?"

Albert could not deny the authority with which he spoke; he seemed too to feel uneasy under the imputation laid against him.

"I skulk in no man's path," he retorted with much hauteur, "though who, and what I am I shall not tell thee, until I first know who it is that makes the demand: accident alone brought me here, nor did I think to find holy men and pious sisters—"

"No more of that," interrupted the palmer in returning anger; "as you value your life, never let that be named again."

Albert was astonished both at the threat itself implied in these words, as also at the tone in which it was uttered ; it was more than inexplicable to him, but Hubert's late lessons were not thrown away, and however he might feel disposed to retort the stranger's haughty menace, he remembered that other things were to be considered, besides the gratification of at best but a testy humour ; repressing therefore the sneer with which he thought to return his threat, he merely replied,

“ Believe me, I care not to name it, 'tis no affair of mine.”

“ You act wisely—only remember—”

Albert could not resist the momentary impulse, and he archly interrupted him—

“ Remember the lady? Oh, to be sure !”—and ere he had uttered the words, again was his hand to his sword, awaiting the expected ebullition. But it came not, and in the place thereof, the palmer's features relaxed almost to a smile, as if some amusing idea had struck him, and

he felt rather pleased than annoyed by Albert's sally.

It was at this moment that the sound of footsteps reached them, and the next instant De Bourgh turned round an angle of the walls and hastily approached them; he seemed instantly to recognise the palmer as an old acquaintance, although the quick signs that passed between them, and De Bourgh's evident confusion, prevented the young man's learning further, and their instantly retiring to some distance from him ere either spoke, lost to him their saluting words. They continued in earnest conference for some time, each moment moving still farther and farther from him, until at length they both turned out of sight.

Albert mused what this should mean, waited many minutes for De Bourgh's return, and at length becoming impatient of his absence, followed in the same path that they had taken; but he could discern nothing of them, and his reflections were becoming each moment more

perplexing, when suddenly the sound of voices reached him from behind the small bank by which he stood : he stooped down, and scrambling on his hands and knees, gained so close upon the speakers that he could readily gather their words.

He at once discovered that it was De Bourgh and the palmer in earnest conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

"How courtesy would seem to cover sin!
When what is done is like an hypocrite,
The which is good in nothing but in sight."

SHAKESPEARE.

OH ! how changed is that sweet cup, wherein the pleased soul has revelled beyond contentment, when the acrid gall, wherewith treachery has mingled it, first betrays itself on the unsuspecting lips, and its former sweetness is now nauseating bitterness — a bitterness, which palls upon the palate and makes what was before so much desired, now valueless and despised.

Not very dissimilar were Albert's feelings, upon gaining the first words of the speakers.

"The stripling lacks not wit," it was the palmer who spoke, "and may be troublesome; he must be secured."

"And in good troth," replied De Bourgh, "he could not be better disposed of—his wayward restlessness will then annoy the king no more, and save De Bourgh an infinity of trouble."

"But hark ye, Hubert," rejoined the palmer, "no blabbing to the youth, give him no intimation of his fate."

"Depend upon me, I'll cajole him to your—"

They had passed onwards as De Bourgh spoke these latter words, and Albert failed to gain any further of their import; but he had already heard enough—enough to damp every hope, to destroy every confidence, to sadden every cheerful promise into deepest despondency. He rose not from the earth, for his soul was cast down, even to the ground, and in the

bitterness of that moment he yielded himself to despair.

Was it indeed so, that Hubert de Bourgh, the assured friend of his cause, the believed stay of his hopes, his sworn protector amid crowding dangers, his trusted foster-parent to whose guidance he had committed himself, and without whose aid, in a land of strangers and violence, he was lost—was it possible that he could be a traitor, and perfidiously be beguiling him to certain destruction, and sacrificing his young life to the fury of his enemies? It was impossible, the very thought was monstrous after his known fidelity and truth—but what was surmise after so certain, so undeniable an evidence—Albert's very soul sickened as he asked himself the question—De Bourgh *was* false—and what then was he? already beyond escape, in the hands of his foes, and death or a never-ending imprisonment his speedy doom;—for he knew not how to flee—had not the energy to attempt so futile a chance.

Oh ! how bitterly did his thoughts rush back to the scenes he had left, in comparison a heaven of bliss to the wretchedness now around him, and groan for one moment's return thereto, if but to give him a better fortitude to meet his doom. The unlooked-for blow was indeed too extreme for his boldest courage, and its very abruptness but paralyzed the more entirely his resolution and energy. He suddenly started from that depth of hopelessness—had he indeed heard aright ? might he not have misconstrued his words, and be judging his protector unjustly ? He thought over each syllable of the blighting conference, but alas ! with little comfort, little satisfaction,—and that palmer, whose strange influence seemed to have injured so cruelly his prospects, who was he ?

But Albert's inquiries, however conflicting, were marked with an even more distracting anguish, upon discovering that De Bourgh was hastily returning to where he had parted from

him. Some decision was now imperative; it could not be longer delayed—to evade him, and committing himself to Providence, attempt the improbable escape, still seemed less fraught with peril than any other course, and he yet lingered to quit his recumbent posture, which concealed him from his observation.

De Bourgh passed on without discovering his concealment, and soon turning round the abbey, seemed to direct his steps towards the village, as if he thought to find him there.

Instantly did Albert spring up, and avoiding the direction which the palmer had taken, rush into a thickly wooded path on the opposite side of the abbey to that by which De Bourgh had disappeared. No sooner, however, had he thereby secured himself, as it would seem, from all chance of present detection, than his mind misgave him for the proceeding, and he almost condemned himself for rashness; it now appeared to him in the strongest point of view, that he was encountering great and certain dangers,

to avoid uncertain, nay, it was possible, improbable ones.

De Bourgh might still be faithful, in spite of the mystery of his conduct, might still redeem his promise ; and were it indeed so, and through false apprehension he should abandon his protection and come to harm, would his heart ever forgive him, or could he ever excuse to other hearts, whose welfare was as dear as his own, that his irreparable error ? And his promise too—the anxious pledge that affection had asked from him, not only that he would confide in this De Bourgh, but conform to his directions in all things, nor ever leave him—a promise exacted by those who well knew the man, and could trust his own inexperience to his assured wisdom—and should one suspicious action, he impatiently asked himself, do away with all such forcible considerations, and counteract so kind provision ?

Albert as he made the inquiry, was already retracing his steps, and, hastily follow-

ing after De Bourgh, overtook him ere he had regained the village, and saluted him, to appearance at least, with his previous cordiality.

“ You are welcome back, good father.”

“ And so are you, Albert—I have been long looking for you.”

De Bourgh spoke in an hesitating, thoughtful tone, and at once relapsed into his previous reverie: Albert liked not this absent mood, it increased materially his apprehensions, fixing more deeply the suspicion to which he had yielded himself, and he determined to watch him with even more doubting jealousy. De Bourgh seemed suddenly to become conscious of his silent musing, and abruptly demanded,

“ Where hast thou been, Albert?”

Albert looked stedfastly in his face, as he retorted:

“ And where hast *thou* been, good father?”

De Bourgh seemed unprepared for so direct a question.

"I been? oh, I—I went—not far."

"And thy friend, Hubert?"

Albert watched him closely. De Bourgh started from his reverie, seemed for a moment perplexed, and then with apparent candour replied: "No great friend, Albert, a mere acquaintance; an old warrior, like myself, meets many such, and often when he least expects them."

"No doubt—" the youth spoke with a supercilious irony, that seemed to annoy his listener; "and yet methought that no slight good understanding existed between you and the holy man."

"Mere common-place about former remembrances; you may easily imagine, that, with me, such topics are not scanty."

"Oh! it is beyond imagination, Hubert; when one sees the sun 'tis needless to fancy how piercing are his rays."

"You speak enigmatically, my young friend," replied De Bourgh, apparently not slightly

annoyed ; “ explain yourself — what do you mean ? ”

“ ’Tis immaterial, good Hubert—for you may perhaps easily imagine, that of mysteries it is only natural to speak somewhat obscurely.”

Hubert now in his turn gazed stedfastly at his young companion, and his stern, almost severe look seemed to penetrate to his very soul, his eyes shrunk to the ground, and he waited silently for his expected reply. Hubert still hesitated to address him, as if he wished that his evident confusion should work a better cure than any words of his ; and when at length he did speak, it was in a harsh caustic tone, that dropping the more familiar name which his adoption had given him, he pronounced a less simple appellation. Albert started.

“ —Either must your confidence in Hubert de Bourgh be explicit, without limit and without doubt, or his services are worse than useless. This is not the time to make professions, nor shall I descend to clear myself from your petu-

lant suspicions—again I repeat, give yourself to my direction, and, as I have said, what man can do, shall be done—doubt me, nay, ever so little, and your best course is instantly to retrace your steps, and learn from those who know me better, how misplaced has been your mistrust.”

He paused, but Albert was far too much perplexed to reply ; so fair a shew of candour, and so assured truth, struggled with his own certain conviction of his treachery, and kept him unknowing what to decide.

“ Nay,” continued De Bourgh, in the same offended manner, “ let us, once for all, understand each other. Circumstances, which I could neither foresee nor control, nor yet shall explain, render it imperative that you commit yourself to my guidance, without even seeking to know the motive which directs me, though the course which I decide upon may seem both strange and vacillating, nay, actually in opposition to all original plans,—can

you do this faithfully? Take leisure to ask yourself. I would have an unhesitating decision."

Albert's confused thoughts scarcely permitted him to make the mental examination that De Bourgh required, certainly not with that calmness that would have been desirable for the required conclusion. He saw himself in the hands of a man of no mean penetration, who seemed to read his inmost thoughts, and whose present power over him was more than ample to do with him as he pleased—he had in fact but little choice for his decision—for whether committing himself unreservedly to De Bourgh's admitted tortuous proceedings, he gave him the required pledge—or resigning his direction, and with it his long and so extensively organized plans, he should resolve to retrace his steps, still every thing depended upon the man's fidelity—without it, neither determination could avail to his safety, for the same influence would govern the one and defeat the other, and with

it, if flight was to be secured through his agency, that same truth which in such a case would be his security, would also be the pledge of his safety in any, the most ambiguous situation to which he could lead him. Believing, therefore, that his fate was entirely in De Bourgh's hands, he yielded to the paramount necessity, and in a firm tone declared—

“My mind is fixed—I yield myself to the required guidance.”

“Without any mental reservation? I ask for truth—have you considered all the conditions?”

“I have,” again asserted Albert, “and submit to them, unsatisfactory as they appear.”

“Then I am satisfied,” said De Bourgh, “and again my parental care is yours; that the conditions to which I bind you appear ungracious I cannot now avoid, but believe me when hereafter you know my motive for the proceeding, you will both admit its correctness, and feel that I had no other plan left for

me : so much I say for your better satisfaction, and having so said, any further explanation is not even to be demanded."

"I understand and am content—with one exception—the palmer, with whom you found me encountered—who was he?"

"'Tis needless to introduce you to so transitory a character—you may never see him again."

"Did your conference apply to me?"

"No man, who bears so holy a badge, would tamely submit to be scoffed at, and not wish to know who was his traducer."

"Then you do know that I taunted the holy man—pray, did he tell you wherefore I reviled him?"

"Perhaps he might."

"And what further said he?"

Hubert was silent.

"One question more, Hubert, and I have done: has the acknowledged alteration in your plans been an effect of your conference?"

“Content thee, content thee, my young friend,” quickly interrupted De Bourgh, “I must prohibit this close examination as a breach of our treaty ; all I can add, is a caution not to give way to improbable surmises, but to judge of things as you find them ; and, as long as the road seems fair and pleasant, not to annoy yourself with the thoughts of the hills and roughnesses that may lie in your way—But let us to our rest, these are our quarters, and the morning is already far advanced—we should be off again by noon.”

It may be imagined that Albert retired to his couch for any other purpose than that of sleep ; still, though doubts seemed to multiply around him, and against the array of dangers that appeared to threaten him, there was not one comfort save in the questioned fidelity of his protector, he yielded himself not to the believed despondency of his situation, but bearing in mind his asserted confidence in his guidance, and, as it were, compelling himself to

reject apprehension, and encourage what little of hope De Bourgh's declared truth and warm assurance had given rise to, his busy thoughts at length resulted in a more peaceful quiet ; and he could look back on sweeter scenes and dearer hopes, not only without his former anguish, but even with pleasure and that heart-felt transport, wherewith hope tinges our fond imaginations, but which the hopeless never know.

From restlessness his wearied thoughts had passed into a better composure, and his exhausted frame was soon fast sinking into repose. What soothing influence was that which charmed his troubled spirit into peace, and bade doubt pass away, or at least be forgotten in some better confidence ?

A miniature lay on his pillow—it was in those loved lineaments that his eyes, gazing with affection's smile, had learned confidence, and in its look of love had found comfort. Did those parting lips indeed speak, or was it but

the pleased fancy that gave them words, and made them bid him to a better cheer ?

As a guardian angel did that fond image hover around him, and cheat him of his depression with images of the brightest fortunes ; his purposes seemed arrived at a happy termination, to be crowned with every success, and, resting from his cares and troubles, he seemed to be revelling in the reality of his fondest anticipations.

Wherefore did he start, and wherefore that sad look of disappointment wherewith he gazed around him ?—alas ! the happy dream had fled, and he had awoke to the sterner truth—a sigh, deep as heaviness and bitter as disappointment burst from him—but then again did his eyes fall on that smiling image that gazed so fondly on him, and his soul refused not the peace it seemed to ask—his looks were fixed upon it as if by some mighty spell ; and when at length his feeble imaginations were overpowered by his body's exhaustion, and he again sunk into sleep,

still was that dear image vividly before him, and again did it beguile him with the sweetest dreams.

Albert did not again awaken, until De Bourgh's summons aroused him from his lengthened slumber.

Upon proceeding on their journey, it was with great surprise and uneasiness that he observed, that De Bourgh led the way in a very contrary direction to that originally marked out, and in which so far they had been travelling: their course hitherto had been almost due north; now, however, after retracing their morning's steps for some miles, they took a road to the westward, along which his companion urged their quick advance.

Neither this proceeding, nor De Bourgh's thoughtful silence tended to improve his hardly gained confidence; it was plain enough that some great change had taken place in his guide's plans, and connecting the suddenness of the change with the morning's events, it was

almost conviction to his mind, in spite of De Bourgh's assurances, that some treachery was intended him, even as the detected words so plainly declared ; and he had scarcely the heart to proceed.

It was not until the evening, when, upon mounting a considerable rise in the road, a large and stately city lay at some few miles distance below them, that De Bourgh slackened his horse's pace, and entered into conversation with his companion—

“ I have been thinking, Albert, how singularly this ill-fated country has been doomed to witness wrong and violence in herrulers, as well against each other as their subjects. I allude not to our earlier history, when almost all was anarchy and confusion, but simply since the Conqueror's time, whose reign of violence has been, in his descendants, followed by so glaring and so universal wrong. His two younger sons successively robbed their elder brother of his crown; the daughter of the younger of those

brothers was driven from the throne by his sister's son ; and perhaps had Prince Henry lived, Richard might have done to him, as John has to Prince Geoffrey's children : it would almost seem, that injustice is indigenous, and flourishes in the English soil."

" Not exactly *flourishes*, Hubert, though generally has it maintained its hold, still has it brought slight good to its actors. Little comfort had even the Conqueror in his hardly earned crown, for nought but tumult and insurrection marked his iron reign, and, from the day he became England's King, he might be said scarcely to have known a moment's peace. His son Rufus, the usurper of his brother Robert's rights, was prematurely slain, and his successor's fondest hopes were miserably blighted. Although Stephen, after numberless vicissitudes, managed eventually to keep the crown until his death, yet was it one of turmoil, and he almost died of a broken heart. And think you the usurper John finds peace in his injus-

tice? Oh! no, distrust and fear are his counsellors—murder and cruelty his agents—and to a throne so supported, where, Hubert, can there be satisfaction?”

“Not much, as the tyrant’s terrors so plainly declare—suspicion, Albert, generally betrays itself in some unintended weakness, and ever magnifies danger.”

“I understand you, Hubert.”

“If so, let me ask, does your confidence still continue in your protector’s truth?”

“I am content, Hubert.”

And Albert *was* content; for no sooner had he beheld that their course lay towards the city before them, than the probability of being able to escape from De Bourgh’s suspected guidance, to the less doubtful care of some other of the confederates, animated him into cheerfulness, and he had already planned a thousand various schemes for effecting his purpose.

“I trust, Albert,”—De Bourgh accompanied the inquiry with a piercing glance—“that your

affirmation really means yes—if not, I again warn you of the consequences, and advise you to relinquish your projects.”

Albert was silent.

“That city in the plain is our destination, and once there, your further safety is as much in your own keeping as mine.”

“I am prepared, Hubert, let us e’en speed on.”

“Not so fast, my young friend; I have thus far hurried you in silence forwards on two accounts; first, that your uninterrupted thoughts might determine your estimate of me under the most unsatisfactory circumstances,—that estimate being declared to be satisfactory, I proceed to explain my second object; which was no other than to redeem a pledge to reach our destination soon after sunset—you see the sun is still above the horizon, and we have only an easy hour’s ride before us.”

“Proceed, Hubert,”—Albert had noticed that he paused—“I am all attention.”

“ You must not however either ask or expect me to tell you the nature of that pledge, save, and let it suffice you, that on the honour of a knight, it is for the happy advancement of our best plans. What I would now say, Albert, is with a view to advise you, that once in the crowd that yonder awaits you, there must, on your part, never be one moment's deviation from that extreme caution which I have so often urged to you; one false step may be your ruin. Above all, remember our assumed relation—try, Albert, to realise me in your mind as a parent, and believe, that whether present or absent I am watching over your safety: your prudence I can trust—your resolution, too, I doubt not—your courage will not be called to account, except yourself put it forwards, and you had far better husband it for real dangers, than let it run wild in useless encounters with strangers, or even in needless mockery of unholy palmers.”

Albert smiled—

“But your friend, Hubert, was so barefaced a sinner.”

“According to your suspicions, Albert; but all men, and specially those who would be thought holy, have no great love to be told of their faults, from such a stripling; therefore should you ever again meet the palmer, you had far better omit to taunt him, and so avoid the chance of again embroiling yourself.”

“Not I, indeed—I little liked his company this morning to desire to continue his acquaintance.”

“But I would wish still further—I would have you not even seem to know him—no, if possible to restrain the mere consciousness of a look: he may perhaps return your revilings with interest, somewhat inconveniently so, so beware him—do you think you can so command your feelings,

try, Hubert, but when and where
to meet the palmer?”

“That I cannot say, I would only prepare you how to proceed should any chance cause you again to encounter him ; and I only add, Albert, make as many friends as you can, you have already enemies enough, so do not unnecessarily increase the number.”

De Bourgh was again silent, and Albert's confused ideas prevented the very consciousness that he spoke not ; mystery seemed to thicken around him, the perplexities of his situation to increase rather than diminish, and his surmises were even more vague, more unsatisfactory, more intricate than ever.

In spite of the certain conviction of his deceit, the kind earnestness of De Bourgh's manner almost staggered his mistrust and cheated him into some kind of confidence, and it was with a decidedly better feeling, that upon entering the town, he exclaimed to him—
“Lead the way, father, your son moves not a step but as you direct—has no trust but in you.”

De Bourgh bowed his head, and his stately form moved proudly on, seeming to eclipse the slight youthful figure that rode by his side, and who now, in the noise and bustle around him, clung eagerly to his protection.

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CHAPTER V.

"One step I have advanced thee ; if thou dost
As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way
To noble fortunes."

King Lear.

DE BOURGH had not proceeded far when he suddenly diverged from the main street ; and, winding his way along some narrow alleys, speedily halted at what appeared in the now evening dusk to be a low, gloomy-looking building, of which neither the dismal aspect, nor the situation in an obscure, mean part of the city, tended to his companion's comfort. Approaching a solitary postern he knocked

loudly for admittance, and then assisting Albert to dismount, for his fatigue appeared excessive, he whispered in his ear—

“Cheer up, my son, here is our journey’s end—mind, and perhaps ’tis the last time I can caution you, be prudent, and fear not.”

The door was soon opened, and De Bourgh at once entered, followed closely, though with no very blithe steps, by Albert, who, as he entered the massive porch which the opened door disclosed to him, seemed to leave hope and happiness behind, to resign himself to bondage. But his bodily exhaustion made him, at the moment, less susceptible of mental impressions, and he almost felt careless of the dangers that he believed himself to be encountering.

One thing was beyond doubt, his fate was entirely at De Bourgh’s mercy, and, be his doom what it might, he could now neither avoid nor counteract it; to confront it with what courage he could was his only course. And

whether the feeling which resulted from such a conviction was really one of reliance, or that the mere hopelessness of his condition tied him closer to the protection of the only being he knew, there was now an earnest solicitude in his manner towards De Bourgh, an anxious watching of his looks, that at least had the semblance of confidence; and he followed his steps through various lengthy passages, along which he seemed to move with the air of good acquaintance, without any further hesitation.

Albert certainly had at first believed, and appearances perhaps justified him in so believing, that a prison's walls encompassed him, and it produced no small improvement in his feelings, when he encountered various serving-men in place of grim-looking jailers, and when, more than once, certain savoury smells reached him, alike encouraging to his mental depression, as promising recreation to his body's exhaustion. These signs of better things he hailed with no small content, nor was

such growing satisfaction checked upon Hubert's marshalling him into a handsome apartment, and, without further loss of time, directing refreshments to be immediately served ; nor more especially, when, upon the viands which were to constitute their supper promptly appearing, he distinguished a karum pie, as also rich pasties and other dainties, such as in those days were only to be seen on the tables of the great and wealthy.

Where all was mystery, surmises on any part were worse than useless, and Albert decided rather to enjoy the good whilst it lasted, than trouble himself with brooding over evils until they actually burst upon him ; the consequences of which wise determination, however, augmenting as they might be to his own spirits, produced a very contrary effect on the good things before him.

De Bourgh at first seemed to have no other thought save that of the necessity of recruiting exhausted nature ; and indeed, judging from

appearances, it would seem to be a necessity of sufficient moment to preclude, at least for the instant, all other thoughts, as no one could more zealously have employed himself for such purpose. He spoke but little, nor encouraged his companion's attempts at conversation; he rather, indeed, repressed, by the shortness of his answers, the very desire to utter, staying, by signs too plain to be misconstrued, his purposed wish to obtain some satisfaction as to his strange, inexplicable proceedings.

They were still so occupied when a demand was made at the door for admittance. De Bourgh seemed disturbed, and detecting Albert's eager scrutiny, rose suddenly up to hide his confusion, and opened the door.

A thin, short, cadaverous old-looking young man entered the room with a kind of dubious limp that he intended should pass for a sprightly amble, grinning somewhat in the manner of a laughing hyena, and evidencing his high satisfaction at beholding De Bourgh,

in a voice between a squeak and a whistle, of so peculiar a construction, as to cause Albert to look up to ascertain whether it was his nose and not his mouth that produced it—

“Ah, Master de Bourgh, thou prince of joy—thou apple of my eye—thrice art thou welcome!”

“And even thrice art thou,” returned the veteran, “most delectable Talbot; thy very sight is as a cordial to an empty stomach.”

“But thou, Master de Bourgh, art like the rising sun unto longing eyes.”

“And thou, Master Giffard, like his meridian brightness—too dazzling to behold”—He added in an under tone, “Consummate ass!”

“Oh, rare Hubert! by my halidome thou overcomest me with the exquisiteness of thy wit; pray when was this good city enriched with thy presence.?”

“When, Master Walter? Why ’tis not many days ago—as yet not even many hours have

departed—in fact, most noble Lord, we are but now arrived.”

“And thy young friend, most honoured chamberlain?”

“My son Albert, the youngest of my boys.”

“Somewhat alighter than his brothers methinks, Master Hubert; thy stock is generally, as thyself, strong and sinewy.”

“The boy was always delicate”—De Bourgh seemed impatient of his inquiries. “But what, Master Giffard, brings your illustrious person to the court?” he glanced at his half-concocted form and muttered, “thou apology for a monkey, much less a man.”

“Business, Master Hubert, state affairs, and so forth; though not exactly affairs of the state—save, indeed, of my own proper state and dignity—and, moreover, strictly private.”

“Oh, private—I understand; the court is indeed indebted”——

“Go to—go to, Master Chamberlain, the court is none indebted. Wouldest scent my

secret, eh? Well, well, I mind thee not, for already thou knowest my failing—the women, good Hubert, the women—always bringing me into some scrape.”

“Ay, thou hast no doubt much to answer for that way; so irresistible a gallant as thou must needs make sad work amongst them—but who is the fair, some court beauty, I ween?”

“Thou imaginest wrong, Master Hubert, very far wrong; couldest not, indeed, have guessed much further wrong. I wish it had been some court beauty, then had Walter Giffard been happy, and spared this troublesome journey, besides my twenty good palfreys to boot.”

“What! has the frail one jilted so superb an admirer? Impossible!”

“Jilted, indeed, Master Hubert! by my troth, no; such a fate has yet to occur to my Lord of Talbot,” and he surveyed with most excessive complacency his decrepit form—
“Rather too killing, eh? I flatter myself the

poor things are far too glad to be won. Mayhap thou hast seen the silly moths buzzing about thy taper's light; cast them away even as thou pleasest, again and again do they return and rush even more recklessly to their destruction—fit emblem of the pretty play-things that we vulgarly term women."

"And thou the taper's light, most noble Talbot? Happy, enviable man! but so courted by beauty, where's thy present disappointment?"

"Not with the lady, Master Hubert; the gay, smiling spring could not smile on the hearts of men more gratefully, nor the gentle zephyr breathe more sweetly, than does my lady-love on me; and yet it was to preserve her kindness that I came up hither."

"Thou speakest in parables, most worthy Giffard."

"A parable, a hidden saying, hidden to him who cannot understand; I will desist the

imperfect words for plainer speech: thou knowest Harry Widville?"

"My Lady Albermarle's seneschal?"

"The same, Master Hubert—but dost thou know his wife, the Dame Margaret, that most superb among women?"

"What of her, Master Giffard? so fair and so kind, where's thy grievance?"

"Simply this: Albermarle's practised eyes have found out our loves and told it to the king, who at once threatened to give the church her husband an intimation of my fortune—an interference by the by, on the part of his grace, by no means convenient, notwithstanding our wide degree."

"Somewhat inconvenient it must be admitted,"—De Bourgh disdainfully surveyed his wintry form—"the consequences might have been fatal to the state."

"True, Master Hubert, true; and so to prevent such consequences, and preserve my

fair one's love in quiet, the state or at least its ruler has benefited."

"Oh! I see, my illustrious peer, you have been to secure his grace's favour—"

"—And silence with my twenty palfreys, all of my matchless Arabian breed; but his grace would not let me off for a jot less—thou knowest, De Bourgh, he hath a like infirmity, and nothing delights him better than to shew up a fellow-sinner—perhaps he thinks it excuses some little his own irregularities. The king has fine times just now, I trow, for I found that miserly fellow Hamo de Masco in the presence on a like errand."

"Beahrew me, that ascetic hypocrite a lady's swain! I'll ne'er believe it, Talbot."

"Not so fast, Master Hubert, not so fast. I said not that he sought to gain a like favour—thou indeed didst him injustice to suspect the calculating wretch of aught so delectable: what he wanted was extortion and gain, and he bribed our greedy monarch into concurrence,

by undertaking to pay him one half of whatever part of his neighbour Ivo Mohun's lands, the king's permission to sue may gain him."

"Oh, rare justice! oh, happy England in so equitable an administration of her laws! well have the Norman statutes and our second Henry's wisdom benefited us."

"By my troth, far better than any other rule, when a slight relinquishing of a part, secures to the suppliant the remainder, and where the acknowledged pillars of the throne can for a mere trifle secure their every purpose."

De Bourgh again scrutinized this excellent sample of the throne's support, nor could he repress the intrusive smile which the misnomer called forth, when he beheld the exsiccated spindles before him, scarcely able to bear their own weight, much less to assist in keeping up the dead heavy lumber yclept the state. "Pillars indeed!" he spoke in a side breath, as his lip curled up with almost ireful disdain—"needs—straws—pillars forsooth!"

The delectable seemed not to relish these interjectory remarks, much less the accompanying smile and sneer in which De Bourgh more evidently indulged, and he abruptly changed the subject by remarking : "Thy son, Master Hubert, seems disturbed by our talk?"

De Bourgh hastily replied, "The boy is but young, Master Giffard, nor has he been accustomed to hear of such gallant feats, as those of which thou boastest."

"The stripling will soon mend of that, Master Hubert, eh?"

"Mayhap he may; but spare the boy, good my Lord, he hath not yet half recruited himself, and thy notice abashes him. Wilt thou pledge me, Master Giffard, in a cup of canary? 'Tis his Majesty's own; none of your impost stuff, but right good stingo of his own importing."

"With all my heart, good chamberlain: to thy good health, and thine—Albert, didst thou not call the boy? Right good stingo, Master

Hubert, most royal nectar. Albert ! that's a new name in thine house, I think, is it not ?"

"Not on his mother's side, Master Giffard—but pray how is thy cousin Robert ? is he yet in this gay city ?"

"In good faith I know not ; people say so, but I cannot vouch for the fact from any personal knowledge—but I was asking after thy son—I knew not thou hadst one so young."

"Perhaps not ;" De Bourgh seemed as much annoyed as perplexed ; he felt that he had inadvertently betrayed his fears—and perhaps his best support, under his now hesitating solicitude, was the calm unruffled air of the very origin of his anxiety ; for Albert, whatever might have occasioned his agitation, had, instantly upon its being noticed, suppressed the impulse, and was now apparently as unconcerned as if nothing had occurred to disturb him.

It was perhaps a relief to both—to Albert an extreme one, when at this moment a single tap at the door announced an addition to their party:

The individual who speedily entered appeared to be another gay butterfly of the court, for his dress, though not so finical and foppish as Talbot's, was even more splendid; and although his richly embroidered cloak was not quite so overloaded with fur, neither his doublet so long, nor the toes of his shoes so preposterously turned up, (Talbot's curling above his knees, and hanging by silken strings from his fantastically-worked girdle in the very exuberance of the fashion of the day,) yet there was an air of dignity about him, and his vestments, studying rather graceful elegance than fashion, seemed so strongly to speak a consequence beyond his outward garb, that it was impossible not to admit that he was of no mean pretensions. His manner was even more careless than Talbot's, he was likewise both gracious to look upon, and his well-proportioned figure and alluring carriage commanded good will, in place of chiding it away with Giffard's repulsiveness. The most oppo-

site things, however, often mix well together—bring even contrarieties into the mortar of circumstance, and the pestle of interest or convenience will beat them into a mass; and so it seemed with these converse gallants, for both a good understanding existed between them, and it would also have been difficult to decide, on whose part had been the ~~greater~~ pliancy, and whether of the twain had yielded the most to produce that degree of fellowship which undoubtedly had been produced.

Albert's hasty glance upon the stranger's entrance seemed however to deny the graciousness of his appearance, as, having so glanced, he instantly and calmly returned to his interrupted meal, nor shewed any further signs of interest in their proceedings. Whether it was, that the youth was indignant at the inquisitive look, with which the whole three for that moment scrutinized him, or that he really felt no interest in the man, or that he was otherwise and, as he might imagine, better employed, if

would perhaps be mere idle speculation to inquire; but certain it is, that he never relaxed from his indifference, nor betrayed a consciousness that their observations even reached him.

“Most valiant De Bourgh,” saluted the stranger in a somewhat melodious tone, “the city of the anointed delights to hold thee—ah, my lord of Talbot! thou here? what in the name of the fairest houri of paradise brings thee from the revels? thou, so good a knight and true!”

“Satiety, good cousin, satiety,” affectedly replied the earl; “there is a point at which enjoyment becomes trouble, pleasure, pain—even the valiant Mars slept in the very arms of Beauty.”

“Ay, and there, too, her dusky husband found her; all men, Walter, are not quite so unlucky, eh?”

The earl laughed.

"And pray," continued the stranger, "how speeds our good friend, Hubert?"

"Excellently well, Master Santer," returned De Bourgh, "as this shrinking beard amply certifies."

"But thy companion is not idle, Hubert; I query from his play among the meats, if he hath tasted for at least a week: by my troth, one of our holy fathers could not gorge it better."

The laughter which followed this sally, seemed to speak its zest; even Albert laughed, and for the first time intermitted his occupation, if, indeed, when he was unobserved, he had not already done so—he looked rather saucily up, and with much archness retorted—

"I would fain see, thou man of wit, after such a ride as mine, how thou wouldst gorge it; mayhap the holy fathers might suffer by the comparison."

Master Santer laughed immoderately, nor did his associates fail much to support him.

with congenial mirth—it seemed to Albert, that their merriment far exceeded the occasion that had given rise to it; he appeared troubled, and almost instantly relapsed into his previous indifference with the air of a sulking school-boy.

“By my halidome, the stripling lacks not wit,” exclaimed Master Santer as soon as the fit had left him; “whatever else there may be in him, he has that possession however; but come, Walter, I must have thee away with me; De Bourgh will well spare thee, and so will my friend, young Solomon there—come, haste thee, my noble:” he seized hold of Talbot’s arm, and, quickening his limping steps until he soon compelled him to an actual hop-skip-and-jump to keep up with him, the two worthies disappeared through the door.

Albert rejoiced sincerely that the intruders had thus departed, and his satisfaction would have been still greater, had not De Bourgh somewhat hurriedly followed, and entered into

conference with them : the purport of their words, he could not, from the distance at which they spoke, in any way guess, but their low and cautious whispers betrayed that it was of some secret import, and he at once concluded in his own mind—for his penetration had already discovered much more than his prudence had permitted him to acknowledge, that he was the subject of their conference. Such a conclusion soon tossed him back upon that sea of doubt and anxiety, from which the more gracious side-wind of content was gently wafting him ; nor did De Bourgh's manner on his return at all stay his course, it rather indeed gave him an extra puff, and drove him even more violently on, for he was still reserved, still betokened silence, or at least all conversation but on the most trifling matters, which he rather encouraged than otherwise ; and himself, with every mark of an obtained object in his countenance, denied his anxious companion any the least satisfaction

as to the continued mystery of his conduct Albert indeed would have been quite cast down, had not De Bourgh, perhaps pitying his evident distress and desirous to cheer his drooping spirits, whispered in his ear, as he seemed to draw breath, between the stanzas he was singing—

“Walls may have ears, Albert—be wise,” and the very same respiration had continued his ditty, as if no intervening even thought had been to interrupt the strain.

Albert *was* wise, and apparently yielding to his fatigue he soon attained a state, if not of sleep, yet so nearly resembling it, as almost to deceive the wary De Bourgh, who, pausing in his martial vespers, soon sunk into deep, silent meditations.

A considerable time had elapsed when De Bourgh, starting as from a sleep, sprung suddenly up, and exclaimed,

“Come, Albert, boy, let’s to bed, our long ride seems to have conquered us both.” And

he led the way through a private door to their sleeping rooms, adjoining that in which they had been resting.

Before, however, quitting him, he whispered to Albert, "Either, my son, thou hast failed to see, or if thou hast seen, thou hast bravely acted thy part, as not even my practised eyes detected thee."

"*I saw!*" was Albert's emphatic reply.

"Then thou wilt do, boy—shouldst thou see again, let the same possession attend thee, and the brightest success awaits us—but more of this anon; now, wasted nature demands repose; seek it, Albert, in peace and safety, and let no anxiety rob thee of it; a father's care and a father's heart watches over thee, and pities the very uneasiness which necessity compels him to add to thy troubles: fare thee well, my son, and may the angel of peace rest upon thee."

He was turning to depart, when Albert seized his hand, and eagerly demanded, though in the same cautious tone—

“ And yet, good father, let me ask—”

“ Not now, interrupted De Bourgh, “ we are watched at present—suspicion might detect us and mar our plans ; I spake not to explain, but simply to cheer your spirits. I must away—again, Albert, confide in me, and be content.”

He had left him ere Albert had even thought of any further attempt to detain him. The young man, in spite of his anxious apprehensions, and the almost certainty of De Bourgh's duplicity, could not but feel comfort in the soothing words of affection that his parting benediction had declared to him ; he sought to dwell upon its assurance, and, armed with its happier confidence, to route the whole array of doubts that sought to overwhelm him. All seemed quiet around him, no danger to lurk about his rest ; and securing his chamber as well as he was able, and committing himself to a surer and a more faithful guardian than even a parent could have been, had one indeed

watched over him, he betook himself to his bed, and calmed by his orisons into tranquillity, yielded to his body's weariness, and soon was his mind no longer conscious of its impressions.

CHAPTER VI.

" There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows."

Julius Caesar.

ALTHOUGH it was very late the next morning when De Bourgh called him, Albert was still asleep, so overpowering had been his late fatigue ; he awoke, however, all the better for his lengthened rest, his spirits, in particular, having received so renovatory a benefit, as in a great degree to have recovered their wonted tone, and he instantly arose with an elasticity as of renewed hope.

He found De Bourgh impatiently waiting his appearance, and all things ready for their morning's repast.

"Come, my son," he exclaimed in a cheerful voice, "speed thee at thy matins to the good things before thee; time passes on, opportunity waits for no man—let us therefore seize both while they are ours."

"With all my heart, good father," replied Albert, smiling,—“and the opportunity—where shall we find that?”

"Not far away, Albert—fortune for once seems kind; this day is, as it were, the first step in our plans, and it must be ours to improve it to the best advancement."

"The means, Hubert?"

"Patience, Albert, still refrain thyself; ignorance is to thee as strength; knowledge is sometimes even hurtful—to thy hopes it might now be destruction, therefore be patient. Thou canst face power and haughtiness, my son, but canst thou stand undaunted in the presence of

wrong—canst thou refrain thy indignation, when outrage sacers upon thee?”

“Whatever our purpose calls for in its attainment, Hubert, I can submit to; thou knowest, or at least thou shouldst know, that even in the most difficult need, I can command myself.”

“I do, Albert, I do, and in that knowledge do I content myself—but an ordeal now waits thee, that will try thy strength to the uttermost, and put thy asserted submission to the severest test—the King.”

Albert started as if an electric shock had passed through him, and it was with no inconsiderable warmth that he interrupted him—
“The King! Hubert, from *you*?—rather say the usurper; give not the fell tyrant—”

“Albert—” De Bourgh pronounced the name with an emphasis so peculiar that Albert’s lips spoke not the unfinished sentence, a conscious blush suffused his face, and he waited with down-cast looks his further censure. “Is this,”

—De Bourgh's tones were those of pity—"is this your vaunted self-command? this your promised submission? I pity you, Albert, feel for the torture which you must endure, but cannot spare it; and I grieve that those hasty words should promise so little for the weal of the plans, which fortune seems so happily to open to us. But, that you may judge how far you will be able to achieve the work appointed you, listen to it, as far as I may declare it. This very day, Albert, must you speak to the King, and that too in the words of gratitude and acknowledgment."

Had Albert been struck dead with these words, he could not for the instant have been more palsied than he now appeared to be; his eyes glared almost incredulously at De Bourgh, and his fixed convulsive look declared the anguish at his heart.

"Speak not now," De Bourgh continued, "not in the haste of indignation, my dear child; but think first—think why it is to be endured—what, if the success which I so plainly see,

should follow it, will be its sweet reward—and then declare your decision.”

Albert still continued silent, the throes of that mental conflict were long, severe, overpowering; once or twice the indignant spirit seemed to struggle for utterance, and again, with the strong effort of a determined soul, was it forced back; still was he silent, and still did De Bourgh wait for the result of that internal struggle, nor strove any further to bias his decision.

At length Albert, with extreme exertion, so far repressed his feelings, as to demand, with some degree of calmness—

“Is there, Hubert, no way to avoid this bitter torture?”

“None, my son, that will promise a tenth part of its advantages; our first plans, it is true, might have brought us to the same result, but the way was both doubtful and circuitous—this is sure and direct.”

“And wherefore is so galling a necessity

added to the trial?—gratitude!—acknowledgment! Did I, indeed, hear aright?”

“Even so, Albert, such are the requisitions.”

“Oh, tell me, Hubert, to what end?—why, and for what am I to submit to thank the?”

“Albert, be composed—the cause of your obligation you shall know from his own mouth, but I will not deceive you; I cannot now be more explicit, or let you further into my plans—the same necessity which has compelled my late reserve still controls me, and you must decide even against any satisfaction.”

Albert looked distress itself—his anguish overcame him, and in the bitterness of his soul, he exclaimed—

“You, Hubert—even you, my sworn protector, are leagued against me, and—” he hesitated—kinder thoughts came over him—he was silent.

“Albert,” De Bourgh spoke kindly, “I pity—I do more; I excuse you—as God is my

judge, that I do is for your good, and alone, without one selfish interest, to advance the cause to which I have sacredly pledged myself."

Albert again paused in mental struggles, but a better feeling seemed to have birth, his previous anguish to have passed into composure; he looked earnestly at his companion, and, as the manly, ingenuous features of De Bourgh seemed to speak fidelity, he advanced to him, and tendering his hand, said, "Hubert, I am to blame—will you forgive me?"

"I have already forgiven you, Albert," was De Bourgh's prompt reply; "but your decision."

"I recede not now, Hubert; be the trial what it may, it shall be encountered, and well too shall it be fulfilled—" he paused; "if, Hubert, I have hesitated, or failed in a proper resolution, you must excuse that also, it has been your obscure policy that has made it so. None but the dark walk well in darkness, and

offices of the place, but the why and wherefore such proceedings, were utterly beyond any comprehension, nor did he stay to inquire.

His conductor, indeed, neither waited for, nor seemed to notice the so natural surprise which this sudden transition could not fail to produce; but, continuing his pace, conducted him through various stately apartments, until presently they were ushered into what appeared to be a small anti-room, in which the tyrants of custom and slaves of form might put off the restraint of rank, and at once withdraw to the more grateful enjoyments of native feeling. So, at least, thought Albert, as for a moment he seemed lost in distant imaginations that almost made him forget that he had a part to act in the new scene around him; but the next he started back to all the demands of his strange situation.

Three ladies sat in this calm retreat; they were all young—that they were highly born, and such as proudest knights might well de-

battle for, Albert at once saw—that they were rich in beauty, radiant with grace, transcendent in loveliness—Albert felt—and, perhaps, had he had a heart to feel a fonder emotion, he would have acknowledged that the vainest of men might have exulted in their merest smile, as the most excellent of human attainments, and that the smallest favour from such hands was more precious than the most illustrious badge which princes could bestow. But Albert's heart was wrapped up in other interests; beauty to him, save in the homage that universal nature pays it, was ineffective, and his mere curiosity looked beyond their loveliness, and sought other features of their appearance.

One was joyous and blithesome, as if gaiety was in her heart, and pleasure was her existence; laughter played upon her lips, and love sparkled in her eyes—her form was almost that of perfection, her beauty of that fascinating nature, that the entranced eyes of admiration looked, and then adored. Perhaps, how-

ever, rich as it was, it might be of too voluptuous a cast, or Albert himself might be somewhat fastidious in his judgment, and he turned abruptly from her to the next fair creature, by whom she was standing.

She was much younger, her beauty too was of that softer, more delicate kind—so fine, so frail, so exquisite, as if, like the first tints of the opening flower, the merest touch would mar its bloom—a beauty, indeed, almost too pure for earthly use; her light hazle eye beamed with that soft feminine grace, that said her heart was made for tenderness, and that the dear charities of woman there luxuriated as in a native soil. But she seemed not to rejoice in her beauty—to delight not in the thousand gratifications by which she was surrounded: a sadness dwelt even in her smile, and when the smile wherewith she answered that joyous one's sally, passed briefly away, it ended in a sigh: languor and listlessness seemed to mark her as their own—the langour of disappoint-

ment—the listlessness of defeated hopes—and yet she seemed the chiefest of her fellows, the highest of those lofty fair ones—and she was not happy. Oh! had Albert read her thoughts, he might have learned how little the highest pinnacle of rank tends to the peace of its possessor—had he heard her plaintive regrets and the oft-repeated wish for the lot of the meanest rustic, he might, perhaps, have gained a lesson that would have moderated his own ambition, and made the object he sought with such avidity, less desirable of attainment.

But he waited not for so ungracious a conviction; perhaps, indeed, had the unwelcome truth knocked for admittance, it would have been denied; and, like the rest of his species, though deceived, and again deceived, still would he rather have submitted to the cheat, than seen the sterner truth—still would have let hope be in the place of fruition, and still have lived on in the dreams of imagination, until the day was gone, the lamp wasted,

and darkness had shrouded him with the mantle of forgetfulness. But he waited not now for any such reflections, his inquiry had rapidly passed to the third lovely one, upon whom his attention was fixed with an absorbing interest.

She, too, was young—perhaps the youngest of the three, was also beautiful, as matchless too in her loveliness, and her air, that of princely dignity—but, alas ! 'twas but the majesty that breathes in marble—so still—so absent—so motionless did she sit, that she seemed but as the mockery of human life ; and yet, even in that waste of reason, there was still so much mind in those deep lines of intellect, which gave to her countenance so sure an evidence of a soul, that the bewildered gazer exclaimed as he almost doubted what he beheld, “ Oh, what a glorious sun is here eclipsed ! ” It was with an air of despondency, that her dark piercing eyes were fixed on the floor, as if she there read an explanation of her darkness ; it was with a look of intelligence, that almost denied the

aberration of her mind—and yet she seemed to know no objects around her, to be unconscious that strangers were near, that prying, curious eyes looked upon her—still she sat motionless, as if dead to all but her own sad darkness. She was apart from the rest, nor seemed to form a portion of their society; lost as were her companions to herself, she seemed to them as a mere cypher in their thoughts, and, so far from even applying to, or noticing her in their conversations, their conduct shewed as if habit had rendered them so indifferent of her presence, that they had even forgot she was near them, nor heard the deep sigh—it was almost a groan—that ever and anon burst from her, and was the only evidence, sad, indeed, was that evidence, that she existed.

But Albert was not so tutored to her calamity; he shuddered at that sigh, it pierced to his very soul as the wail of desolation, and affected him with a strange, mysterious sympathy.

His further attention, however, was suddenly arrested by De Bourgh's introductory words—

“ This, your Highness, is my son, whom his Grace wished to see ; though but a stripling, and albeit now abashed in so august presence, he will not, I trust, disgrace his Highness's notice. Albert, boy, pay thy duty to thy royal mistress.”

Albert might, indeed, have guessed, but this was his first intimation, that he stood in the presence of England's queen, the young Isabella ; his strongest prejudices could not have withheld homage from so much loveliness, he advanced gracefully forwards, and dropping on his knee, spake with animation—

“ Her matchless beauty speaks England's Queen louder than any herald, her princely grace would alone declare to whom fealty is due. Royal Madam, my poor services are at your command.”

The queen smiled, 'twas more than gra-

ciously, and in a far more animated manner, replied—

“ Young Sir, we accept your service; ’twould be hard, indeed, to reject a tender so elegantly and so eloquently made.” She turned suddenly to the laughter-loving maiden, who stood by her, and playfully remarked, “ What thinkest thou, *Thérèse*, could we in justice deny so glib a courtier ?”

“ Nay, Madam,” returned the lady, “ ask not me, your Grace is a better judge of such matters than a poor simple maiden like myself; methinks too, that the young gentleman has already secured your approbation.”

“ Gramercy ! does the simple maiden indeed think so ? thou art humble, child, to-day, and it sits but oddly on thee. I tell thee what, *Thérèse*, I will not trust thee ; those eyes alone would demand homage, even did thy ruby lips not win it with thy smile. Thou ! not know fealty indeed !”

“ Your Grace,” returned the maiden, “ is

merry this morning, and it would ill become me to chide away so unwonted a guest; 'tis, however, one thing, good Madam, to know homage, and quite another to receive it; for I hate empty compliment, and would reject all but that which comes from an adoring and devoted heart."

"By my troth, young mistress, but either thou must be thyself well practised in the business of the heart, or some well-tutored guide has taught thee thy theory; I fear, Therèse, despite thy blushing modesty, it has been the first."

"Nay, good Madam, it was the latter."

"And who thy instructor, child?"

"E'en Nature, Lady; I but listen to her pure dictates, and obey the precepts my heart gives me."

"Sister of Sheba! we submit; it would ill become our simpler knowledge to question so august wisdom.—Pray, good De Bourgh, what thinkest thou of our late addition to our state?"

“To what alludes my royal Mistress?”

“What, De Bourgh! art thou so dull? hast thou so often before seen wisdom at our right hand, and knowledge supporting us, that thou shouldst say, what means thy mistress? Nay, nay, good chamberlain, we hold thee not so slow of skill to know, what e’en thy son would have guessed: I would indeed e’en now lay my newly-gotten crown against thy silvered locks, that our young courtier there would at once shame your older dulness—what sayest thou, young Sir?”

“What majesty,” Albert promptly replied, “condescended to ask, beauty sought to know, and wisdom waited to hear, must, your Grace, have been inspired.”

“Hear you that, Thérèse?—Speak, De Bourgh, what thinkest thou, should we not have won?”

* Had I gaged, my Lady Queen,” archly replied De Bourgh, shrugging up his shoulders, “my locks were surely gone.”

At this moment a side-door opened, and some one entered; Albert, at the instant, was so perplexed with the many and noble eyes that gazed upon him, that he turned not to learn who it was, and it was with no small degree of astonishment that he recognised the voice of Master Santer, as in a careless tone he saluted—

“ Good day, my pretty ones—your fair sweet looks are as the smile of peace, and chide discontent away. Ah! De Bourgh, art thou already here? methinks thou hast surely forestalled the hour, or I am idle: is this your son?”

Albert was ready to sink with confusion; his first glance at the speaker, as he saw his confident air and carriage, caused him to suspect in whose presence he stood, and each word so assisted to strengthen that suspicion into the plainer truth, that he wanted not De Bourgh's intimation to be assured that the usurper John stood before him. The shock

was too sudden—a thousand thoughts crowded into his mind in rapid succession—a thousand conflicting passions tortured him with turbulent wildness—his brain was sick, and his giddy senses reeled with the intoxication of that mental tempest; for those brief moments, he knew nothing, heard nothing, saw nothing—save as it were the angry waves of a furious sea tossed madly to and fro with struggling emotions.

An iron grasp was on his arm, its pressure was agony, for it seemed as if the very marrow was forced from the bone. It was De Bourgh's hand; twice had his summons to pay a subject's duty to his prince been repeated and neglected; the king's first surprise at the youth's confusion had passed into displeasure, and the frowns of anger were quickly gathering on his mutable brow, when the wary veteran, at once to save the youth from falling, and if possible to restore him to his self-possession, forcibly seized his arm, and tightening the pressure

until his very sinews cracked with the strain upon them, promptly led him to the monarch. He forced him on his knee, and, at the same time that Albert felt his grasp trembling for agitation, spoke for him an apology for his disorder, in a tone so calm and unruffled, that the merest indifference might have prompted his words, and not the dreadful fear of that impending error that was ready to crush them with a fate worse than death, if not with death itself.

“My liege,” he said, “pardon the block-head; he’s little used to kneel to majesty, and its presence has confused his senses: mayhap too your Highness”—

“Silence, De Bourgh,” impatiently interrupted the king, “let the stripling speak his own excuse.”

But Albert’s disorder had in some measure passed away; he was now, in comparison, composed, and the excruciating pain that De Bourgh’s grasp still occasioned, was a sufficient

guard against any relapse. Without further hesitation, therefore, he replied—

“ My Lord, how could I know to whom I spoke, when my petulant sauciness offered insolence to Master Santer, and—”

“ Hold thee, boy, hold thee,” exclaimed the king, bursting forth into an immoderate fit of laughter; “ and is that all, simpleton? Nay, vex thee not with that, thou art free to shoot at Master Santer, when and as thou pleasest, if thou’lt but hit the churchmen too.”

“ I was sure, my Lord,” rejoined De Bourgh, “ that it was his apprehension of your anger that alarmed him; but it was your Majesty’s order that he should not be advised of his error, and it would be hard to make him suffer for his father’s strict adherence to his duty.”

“ Nor shall he, good De Bourgh,” quickly replied the king, “ my royal word will not fail. Albert—so I bethink me thou namest him—canst thou serve thy king with a faithful and true

service, and seek his weal even with thy heart's blood?"

"As I hope for happiness, my Lord"—Albert spoke with the warmth of enthusiasm—"desire peace, or look for the blessing of a good conscience, the king shall ever find me devoted to his interest—for him should my heart's blood not only freely flow, but 'twould be my proudest hour, when I might shed it for his good."

"Brave boy, we love thee well; worthy art thou of thy noble father's house, nor will we have thee further from our person than his good self. Henceforth, thou art our page, already near to our heart, and 'twill be thine own fault if thou advancest not to higher honours—but forget not thy pledge."

"Never, dread Sire," Albert hesitated not in his assurance; "nor cease to acknowledge a fortune so beyond my hopes or deserts that—"

"But harkye, boy," interrupted the king, "the queen, thy mistress, demands an equal

service, for her choice had even now decided thee her own ; thou art indeed happy, youth, in so fair a favour—what thinkest thou, canst thou serve so lovely a mistress ?”

“ Already, Sire, has my ready homage waited upon her beauty, and admiration has almost anticipated the beholding. Did dulness ever deny the glorious light of a mid-day sun—or insensibility refuse to own the magic chords of harmony ? My Lord, such things may have been, but never can there exist one hesitating admission of that loveliness which now graces England’s throne—and can I fail in my service to such a mistress ?”

“ Then spare her blushes, boy ; i’ faith, I marvel not her favour, if thy ready speech rings these changes on her beauty—I tell thee what, my Isabel, if my page is to do thee service too, I must clip his tongue, or thou’lt be vain, child.”

“ Nay, my Lord,” replied the Queen, with a melancholy smile, “ fear not ; his prattling

may please, or, at least, amuse, but my days of vanity are past—royal state and sceptered splendour are now, what used to be vanity.”

“ Ah, say you so, my pretty one! nay, I would as lief believe my Lord of Canterbury, our ghostly counsellor, and his strange stories, as thy pretty falsehoods; for not only, Isabel, art thou fair—even passing fair, as well thou knowest—but thou art a woman—and woman never was, or ever will be with one puniest charm, and not be vain on’t—thou seest, Albert, thou wilt learn other secrets, besides those of the state; may thy learning profit thee.”

The king motioned with his hand, and De Bourgh and Albert instantly retired.

Scarcely, however, had they quitted the presence, than Albert, no longer called upon for any further self-command, exhausted by his mental conflict, and sickened to the very heart with the torture of De Bourgh’s well-meant, but severe remembrance, yielded to his weakness, and fainted away.

De Bourgh was only conscious of his situation in time to catch him in his arms, and, hurrying him across the hall, he speedily bestowed him beyond the risk of observation.

CHAPTER VII.

“What need the bridge much broader than the flood ?
The fairest grant is the necessity :
Look, what will serve, is fit.”

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN Albert recovered from his swoon, he found De Bourgh watching anxiously over him with the tenderness of a real parent, a tenderness, which, despite his mysterious conduct, his heart acknowledged with almost a filial gratitude.

He looked confusedly round, and, for a moment, failed to understand what had occurred to him ; but soon did the whole reality return

to his remembrance, and he essayed to ask De Bourgh for some further explanation. But the good man's watchful solicitude at once detected his intention, and motioning him to silence, he insisted—

“ Not now, not now, my poor child, you are still too weak ; wait and recover yourself—sad, indeed, has been your trial, but harsher my stern counsel ; its necessity, however, was imperative—without it—”

“ I was lost,” added Albert, in a faint voice ;
“ so I felt.”

“ Lost, Albert ? ay, but that was only a small part of the consequences—we will, however, speak further of it anon, now compose yourself, as your weakness so much demands ; no one will intrude upon your quiet until my return, when there shall not be a reserve between us ; till then, let nought but peace be in your thoughts.”

De Bourgh waited not for his reply, but instantly quitted the apartment.

“Nought but peace in my thoughts?” bitterly ejaculated the youth, as his comfortless lot appeared to him in even more cruel colours; “Oh! where is peace? where may I look for it, amid doubt, and wrong, and cruelty?” his full soul rushed to dearer scenes—to fonder images, to certain peace—and the replete tide of emotion burst past the feeble barrier, and flowed in overwhelming torrents.

Long was that throe of anguish, and extreme its degree; but oppressed nature felt the relief, and when that assuaging tide had passed, and the lightened waters subsided into calmness, that turbulent grief was also gone, and a better, calmer quiet was in its place, and Albert thought no longer of peril and difficulty, but yielded to happier imaginations, and thought but of hope and happiness.

Sleep crept over him, but even his very dreams were animating, and, when he awoke from them, renewed vigour had come to his body, and fresh assurance to his mind, and the

wondered wherefore his weakness, and that he should have submitted so entirely to his feebleness. He, now, saw no peril to affright him, no difficulty but what he could surmount, and he waited De Bourgh's promised return with all the impatience of youthful ardour and youthful curiosity.

But his perplexities were not yet at an end ; De Bourgh came not, and in his place sent an unsatisfactory message to acquaint him, that he had been suddenly despatched on the public affairs to a distant part of the country.

This was a sad damper to his rising spirits, a woeful check upon his eager curiosity, and threatened to give him back to doubt and despondency ; but a great change had already, even without the promised explanation of his conduct, taken place in his estimate of his foster-parent's truth, producing in place of his previous mistrust a firm and solid confidence ; and already had his active mind seen in those unlooked-for advantages which his new situ-

ation opened to him, so certain a promise of happiest fortunes, that neither could despair have any hold, or doubt now perplex a mind so braced to his work as he felt his to be. Nay, this fresh disappointment but stimulated him to a steadier resolution, and, as he sprung from the couch whereon he had rested, it was with the feelings of one, who, with the prize of his highest ambition almost in his grasp, rushes forward to secure it, that, repressing all prouder thoughts, he devoted himself to the duties of his new office.

How he fulfilled those duties, or how that office comported with his carriage, history tells us not : nor does it appear, in what esteem the king held him, nor how far he himself profited by the gracious promises which the royal words had expressed. He did not, perhaps, desire to advance himself to any honour beyond his present condition, or perhaps that abhorrence towards John's person, which he had so oft declared, and which had nigh betrayed him to

destruction, debarred his advantaging by his promised favour—if the favour of so worthless a patron, or the promise of so faithless a monarch were worth the quest : or perhaps there might be another cause.

It is well known that Albert became a great favourite with Queen Isabella, whose first liking had tended at length to appropriate his services almost entirely to herself ; for beyond the ready tongue which nature had given the youth, and whose first essays had so amused her majesty, Albert possessed many acquirements, such as ladies love, and which queens might delight in : and his minstrelsy, and his lyric lore—his endless tales of bravest knights, and their lady loves—and his vivid scenes of the glorious deeds of the Holy Land, were to her an excitement, that chased away languor, wiled sadness into cheerfulness, and made her many hours of seclusion pass less heavily by. While, on the other hand, her gentle bearing, her bland—almost affectionate

courtesy, and her generous consideration, bound her young page to her in far stronger ties, than his mere office would ever have done.

It was from this very kindness, however grateful to his other feelings, and cheering to a condition, which was at best but as banishment from every dearer tie, that a new feeling had risen towards the usurper; and perhaps that disgust with which he regarded him each time that he beheld him, and recalled to mind his gross infidelity to the young and lovely Isabella, might, in reality, be the preventing cause of his advancement; and, in despite of injuries and crying wrongs, that newer emotion might be to him a more opposing barrier than any resentment of personal damage.

Not, however, that it is to be inferred that he neglected his duty, or failed to render all suitable services, which his lord might expect, and a good page should pay: to appearance, he was nought but the simple willing boy, whose only wished for guerdon was his master's

praise, and his mistress's smile. He might, perhaps, have deeper purposes; and other thoughts, less simple than his seeming youth would warrant, might rule him, and if so, it was well for such purposes that John's irregularities and dissipated habits curtailed the occasions of his service; for Albert soon detected, that, instantly as the queen's notice fell upon him, he was shut out of her consort's confidence, and that other and more trusty pages accompanied him in his many carousals; perhaps, too, he knew more of his master's motives, than John either suspected or would have thought convenient.

So matters went on with the young page, apparently without any material alteration; his reserve and distant demeanour, added, perhaps, to some little feeling of jealousy, kept his young colleagues from any wish to cultivate his acquaintance, in about the same degree that his mild and gentle manners had gained him their *royal mistress's* favour—and he seemed rather

to wish to continue their coolness, than by a more conciliating behaviour to encroach upon these many hours of leisure, of which, perhaps, he best knew the value.

Of De Bourgh he heard but little for some time, but his absence was rendered of less vital importance to his plans, as also less tantalizing to his curiosity, by an incident which occurred not many days after his departure.

There was in the royal establishment a kind of jester, or sayer of sayings, known by the name of Phœdrus; an officer of somewhat dubious standing in the palace, for the days of his fraternity were gone by, at least in the English court, and he was rather permitted out of regard to ancient customs, than his vocation in any way esteemed. And from which woeful degradation of the office, as might be supposed, the person of the jester by no means escaped humiliation. In fact, from standing at the very footstool of princes, and being privileged almost to turn the royal words them-

selves into laughter, poor Phœdrus and his officinals were now kicked out of the presence, and had become the butt of the very lowest of the menials.

In so low estimation, indeed, was he held, that even the young pages, whose light-hearted youth might have, and in many instances did carry them beyond the pride of their noble birth to many questionable compliances, scorned even the merest courtesy to the neglected and despised Phœdrus.

The man's spirits could not fail to suffer under this depression of his calling, and he was seen sneaking and cringing about, as an ill-used cur, expecting insult or even harder usage from every one he met, and seeking to arrest some portion of it by an almost maniac grin.

To this man Albert had adopted the same slighting manner, that passed current with the rest of his young compeers; not, however, so much from any felt disdain, as merely from

a desire to avoid the delay of listening to his medleys.

But the fellow seemed peculiarly intrusive in his regards towards him, and often sought to divert him from the rest of the pages, by stronger and more pointed sayings. Albert, however, was as resolute in avoiding, as Phœdrus was indefatigable in seeking a conference, and many days passed without either yielding the point.

One morning, however, as Albert was returning from his wonted early ramble, he found Phœdrus waiting near the portal, with an apparent determination in his manner as if he would no longer be denied.

Albert felt annoyed, and was preparing some not very gracious rebuff, when the man, in an instant putting off his usual dogged foolery, assumed a look of intelligence and anxiety, that not slightly perplexed him, and caused him to hesitate in his purpose.

Phœdrus still gazed earnestly at him ; Albert

was annoyed, but far more confused than annoyed, and rather angrily demanded—"What want you, fellow?"

The man looked cautiously round ere he replied, in a tone widely different from his common jargon, "Your good, young gentleman."

"What!" exclaimed the page, in an accent of derision, "would thy sapient wisdom counsel me?"

"Even so, young sir," was his quaint reply.

"Arrant knave," retorted Albert, astonished at his calm impudence, "by what privilege dost thou presume even to address, much less to tutor me?"

"By none," returned the man, in the same calm, unruffled manner.

"Then let me pass," and as he spoke Albert motioned with his hand to give him room; but Phœdrus moved not, and the youth again exclaimed in less restrained anger, "Your shoulders, sirrah, shall answer for thy insolence; de-

pend upon it, thou saucy dolt, her Highness shall know of this."

"Albert de Bourgh," rejoined the jester, "disgrace not thyself with this petulance; it ill becomes thee, or the cause thou hast in hand."

Albert started with extremest astonishment; he was transfixed to the spot, and gazed on the jester with an air of incredulity and wonder.

It was at this interesting juncture, that one of the king's favourite pages, Alan Lacy, joined them. Now Albert hated this youth for his dissolute manners, and also feared him, for that he fancied he was a spy upon his actions; and he was, therefore, the more annoyed that he should detect him at speech with the jester, particularly at a moment when he felt it was impossible even to assume indifference.

"De Bourgh," exclaimed the youth with an offensive freedom, which Albert's behaviour had in no way warranted, "what in the name of lady's bower brings thee and that

idiot, ~~as~~ together? thou, too, who art so select—nay so fastidious, in thy associates.”

“What is it to thee, Lacy?” but Albert checked himself; “if, however, thou must know, it was simply that he stood in my path, and, as he would not move, and I could not find another, the natural consequence was we met.”

“And having so met,” rejoined Lacy, with a sneer, “like the jackdaw and the nightingale in the fable, thou stoppest to compare notes?”

“And if we do,” retorted Albert, “Alan Lacy, I presume, is not to judge of its correctness, nor prevent me.”

“Now let Master de Bourgh,” added the pouting jester, in the tone of a sulky child, “hear my fables.”

“Thy fables, indeed,” interrupted Lacy, at the same time that he bestowed a hearty slap on the man’s shoulders; “thou knave, dost thou presume to open those lantern-jaws at me too—but I’ll teach thee better manners, depend

upon it, you rascal;" and then turning to Albert, he added, "but come along De Bourgh, I have a high joke to tell you:" at the same time placing his arm within his.

But Albert met not his advances, and coolly turning off his arm, replied, "Not till poor Phœdrus has finished his fable;"—the man's meaning was not lost upon him—"for, perhaps, Lacy, despite thy high estimate of thyself, his folly, as thou termest it, may have as much pith in it as thy wit."

Lacy bit his lip, but still offered not to go, and Albert, without even seeming to notice his remaining, desired Phœdrus to proceed; when the sayer of sayings in a singing voice, and with a superabundance of grimace, began as follows:—

"Youth despiseth old age, the rich oppress the poor, the great look down upon the little, man treadeth on the worm, and the saucy courtier beateth the man of wisdom."

"Man of wisdom, forsooth!" exclaimed Lacy with a taunting laugh, as the speaker so-

lemly paused in his chaunt, as well for effect as for farther matter; "thou fool!—but marry, whereto thy exordium?"

"Hear wisdom!" continued the orator, giving a peculiar smack of his lips by way of emphasis; "how little knoweth youth but what older experience teacheth it? what enjoyment would the rich have in their riches did not the poor minister to their convenience? and greatness—what were it but for the deference of the little? The despised worm opens the pores of the earth, and hinders its too great solidity—and even so, may the insulted and contemned jester offer knowledge even to the lordly courtier."

Another pause here occurred, which Albert filled up with "Good!" Lacy improved by, "Gramercy for the argument, but what its application?" and the speaker employed in another most imposing smack of his lips, that something like the winding up of a clock, set him off again with renewed vigour.

“Hear then the fable—A certain mouse, running, as mice are often wont to do, over the plain, chanced to meet in his road the huge paws of a certain lion. Now the little mouse might just as well have run round the said mighty paws, and so, avoiding all risk of danger, have continued his pastime in content and safety; but the lion was asleep, and the little mouse was wanton, and in the very idleness of his heart, he skipped upon the mighty paws, and was on the point of jumping off again, when his majesty, feeling that something tickled his royal toe, raised his dexter paw, and, placing it with the most kinglike grace on the top of the sinister one, just as the little mouse’s egregious vanity paused for one short moment to compare the coarseness of the royal bristles with the fineness of his own sleek hide, there enclosed him in a by no means gentle embrace. Poor mousy, how he quailed and trembled! and well he might, for the royal purpose was to

do to him as thou would'st unto a flea—in plain words, to squeeze the life out of him ; when the poor culprit looked piteously up, and sued for grace and pardon. ‘ Why should I spare thee, thou minion ? ’ such were the dreadful tones of majesty ; ‘ of what use canst thou be in my kingdom ? ’ ‘ Sire,’ replied the mouse, who despite his imprudence was one of the senior aldermen of his community, and, moreover, accounted a learned and a wise mouse ; ‘ there is nothing so weak and ignoble, but may do good—the tiny bees produce the honey in the which thine august palate delighteth.’

“ Now this lion was a wise and a prudent lion ; renowned was he among beasts, as was the Hebrew monarch among men for understanding, and he let the little mouse go.”

The speaker again smacked his ominous lips, Albert encouraged, and Lacy threatened.

“ Come, speed thee,” added the latter ; “ a brief end, or a cudgel on thy shoulders.”

“ Mark you the end, and despise you not the wisdom of the fable, nor reject help for that it is mean and feeble. It chanced, not long afterwards, that his majesty was taking his pastime, and happening, in the course of his royal wanderings, to behold a tempting tit-bit in the shape of a fat venison, and his august stomach being at the same time somewhat empty, he at once—for kingly lions are fond of dainty morsels, as well as other kingly things—quickly advanced to satiate his dread desire; when, lo! a snare, which his enemies had laid for his unwitting steps, entrapped his royal person, and he lay fettered in ignoble bondage. His majesty roared and he struggled, and he struggled and he roared; but to no avail; he might as well have spared his royal pains, when mark—who should come to his aid, but the little mouse whom his clemency had spared. Now would not his majesty have been a great fool, if he had rejected his puny assistance, and his pride had scorned him, for that he knew not

how his help was to be made available?"—as Phœdrus spoke the words, he looked full into Albert's face—"to be sure he would, a very great fool; but, as I said, his highness was a wise and a prudent lion, and so submitted to his tiny ally, and the little mouse soon nibbled away the net that encircled the royal person, and the noble lion was again at liberty."

"Bravo, Phœdrus!" applauded Albert.

"I'll e'en say ditto," added Lacy, "if thou'st done."

"No bad moral," rejoined Albert, sensibly struck with some hidden meaning.

"Not from a niding," again added his companion; "but come, De Bourgh, now the fable's done, let's e'en begone."

"But I have a still better," ventured the jester.

"Then out with it," instantly replied Albert.

"A better? beshrew your jargon—but at least I'll none on't," added Lacy, and suiting

the action accordingly, he was out of hearing ere Phœdrus' third word was uttered.

"There was a certain—shallow blockhead"—the speaker's voice instantly returned to his former earnest and more natural tone—"I knew he would not last long—that youth, Master De Bourgh, is a spy on your actions."

"Good heavens! man," exclaimed Albert, perplexed at the man's unhesitating assertion, "how hast thou such knowledge, or what interest canst *thou* have in me, to induce thee to communicate it. I know thee not, and yet thou knowest, or at least thou triest to guess even my secret thoughts.—Who, and what art thou?"

"As I have already said, a friend. Canst thou, young man, acknowledge a friend in one so vile?—the feeblest instruments may aid the more powerful."

"I understood thy fable, man—but what is the evidence that thou art a friend? A wary eye trusteth not every sea, nor will a wise

man confide himself to every fair-spoken stranger."

"True, young Sir, nor do I wish thy confidence, but on equal terms—I come not without credentials."

"Then at once produce them."

"Knowest thou not a certain palmer, young man?" Albert looked aghast. "He knoweth thee, and thou art as a hostage in his hands, for thine own and thy father's truth."

"Ah!" violently exclaimed his listener, entirely taken off his guard by so unlooked-for a position, "then is Hubert de Bourgh indeed false? and is it on such vile footing as that that I am here?"

"Young man, De Bourgh's faithfulness is as truth itself; your own petulancy at first rendered you offensive to the tyrant, and it was by his express command that you were brought here. De Bourgh could not have refused, but at the expense of his own and your safety."

Albert again gazed on the speaker in confused astonishment—

“And dost thou know De Bourgh’s mind too? Who art thou, who in this seeming—?”

“Talk not of seeming, young Sir; few indeed are what they seem.”

Albert’s consciousness kept him silent.

“Know me as I declare myself—thy friend. Thou askedst tokens, and I have given you some, but I have more. Had’st thou betrayed to that palmer the smallest sign of recognition, when he and his worthless confidant confronted thee on the night of thy arrival at Winchester, thy life, without instant flight, was as nothing—dost thou now accredit me? But I have still more—certain perplexities and doubts arose in thy mind of thy protector’s truth, his reserve caused those doubts, and his fear lest even a hint of his purpose might lead you to betray that consciousness which would have been thy hope’s shipwreck, caused that reserve?—Are

you still unsatisfied? Know you not one Roger Mallet?—”

“Stay, man!” impatiently exclaimed Albert, “whoever thou art that readest my secret soul, and e’en satisfies its very doubts—cease, nor speak words such as I have not dared to name even in the deep recesses of my chamber. Thou said’st it was for my good that thou soughtest me—say, is there aught of which thou would’st caution or advise me? I shall receive it, whatever it may be, with thankfulness, and attend to it.”

“I would say little in caution, only beware Alan Lacy, and thy early walks, and think ever that thou art watched by deadliest foes, nor trust to any, unless his tokens are as undeniable as mine. Of advice I would say even less, for you need it not; in your own breast there is a counsellor that will direct you; but what I would say is this—you may want a secret friend, a trusty and ready one—you know not how soon. De Bourgh is far away, and is better

advancing his plans by his absence than his being here could do, and I have sworn to him to be to thee in his stead. When then that time arrives, remember Phœdrus, nor scorn his humble agency—until then we are as widely separated as before. Fare thee well!—I may be missed.”

The man hurried away, leaving Albert to follow as slowly as his perplexing wonder permitted him, and that was leisurely enough.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Care, mistrust and treason wait on him.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE king held a court that day. The courts in those times, however, were not as now ; there was something then besides pomp and splendour—something to be done as well as seen—perhaps, too, more of business than was at all times either agreeable or convenient to the royal holders of them, and who, no doubt, would have hailed, as one of the best and most useful

of inventions, the very easy and expeditious mode in which the gregarious presentations of the present day are dispatched.

But if such was the general character of the courts of that epoch, those of John's reign were more particularly marked by the multifarious matters which continually intruded upon the royal state.

There were held, indeed, other courts, strictly those of justice, at which the sovereign presided, where certain affairs, in which he himself as liege lord, or the nobles among themselves were interested, as well as any appeals from the lesser courts, were decided in person ; but state-affairs were not then reduced to such nice method as now, or if they even had been, the unpolished and rude manners of the barons, who, indeed, knew little of rules, save those of war, would never have been induced to conform to them. The consequence, therefore, naturally resulting from such a state of things, was, that the king was obliged to submit to many vexa-

tious encroachments on those occasions, where more grateful pomp and stately splendour were alone intended. Such annoyances John knew to be abundantly waiting him ; for, infatuated and reckless as he was, he could not but feel that oppression and wrong, such as his, could not fail to raise complaints, and crowd every given opportunity with discontented suitors. He had therefore taken care that those opportunities should seldom enough occur, by entirely abstaining from such shows of princely state, except when some especial need required it.

Such a need did now require every exercise of the royal condescension to draw around him the proud turbulent nobles, and thereby gain strength to meet, and, if possible, to avert the seeming crisis that awaited him.

But strong as was the necessity, there was with the unstable John a fickleness, even in his mode of inducing such a result, that seemed either as the heedless capriciousness of a mad-

man, or the oscillating indecision of a despairing coward.

Now, it was the mad orgies of the midnight cup, or the frantic revels of lowest debauchery, that, while they clogged his base soul with forgetfulness, seemed to unite him in some kind of fellowship, despicable as was such fellowship, with the more profligate of his nobles ; and now the solemn pomp of court-days, and the extravagant pleasures of the evening masques, seemed to cheat even the most clamorous of their wrong's remembrances.

All injuries were to be remedied—all claims adjusted, and complaint no longer to have cause for existence—for the king found it easy enough to promise, when the performance was almost universally to be deferred until the struggle was past, for their cordial co-operation wherein those assurances were held out ; while hand in hand with such pretended inducements, insolence and wrong still stalked openly on ; his pomp and state were guarded by hired strangers, vilest

assassins were the protectors of his carousals, and every where distorting jealousy, and a cold-blooded heart to execute its deadliest suggestions, were his never-quitted directors.

A court of such a pomp, for purposes such as these, and directed by such a spirit, was this day held in the royal city of Winchester.

John masked his face with smiles and courtesy, and strove to hide his heart still more secretly by the gorgeous trappings that he put on. His foreign guards were sumptuously accoutred, and their front ranks, lined with English yeomanry, gave a show as if the whole were native troops: around the throne stood some of the proudest nobles of the land—the most renowned of its warriors; while royal splendour pervaded the whole, and the breath of majesty was mingled with that of a noble crowd of, in appearance, at least, obsequious vassals.

But how different was the actual reality from that fair semblance, that gilded cheat, whose

meretricious coverings scarcely glossed over the base perfidious worthlessness of the sovereign, nor the almost obtrusive insincerity of the subjects, nor hid the real character of the empty pageant.

Proud, indeed, were those nobles—many too, high in martial fame; for there was the noble Reginald De Vere, and the far-famed Stephen de Neaufle, two of the bravest warriors of the Cross, men, who had expended their princely fortunes in the sacred cause, and who now came back loaded with honour and—beggary. There was, too, the haughty Archbishop of Canterbury, one of the most intriguing prelates of the day—and the turbulent Earl of Strigul, a man of vigorous and extended mind, and, perhaps, the only exception to the feeble ministers by whom John was surrounded—and there was too, the time-serving chief-justiciary, Fitz-Peter—but it was through these three men, and their treason to their lawful prince, that the tyrant had gained his crown, and through their con-

tinued influence that his usurpation was still, in a great measure, upheld.

There was, too, Fulke de Cantelupe and Henry de Cornhulle, two of the king's favourite knights, men of rude and debauched manners, whose violence well answered John's purposes, and whose attachment, so as to have that violence at his command, he had secured by mean familiarities and repeated largesses.

There was also the excellent Talbot, and some score of such like sycophants; and there was too the Viscount Limoges, whose denial to Richard of the treasure he had found, had led to that monarch's death, and his own after favour with his successor.

William de Mauclerc and Roger de Eynsford, with many others, were also there; for that they had favours to ask, or wrongs to be redressed, or claims to be asserted of so varied and perplexing a nature, that a far wiser head than John's would have failed in arranging

the discordant mass into any thing like order or peace.

Wherever, indeed, the inquirer looked, he beheld interest and policy as the moving cause of the assemblage; and their cheerless, dissatisfied looks, plainly enough declared, that, few as was the number of the attendants at the court, even of that few, none came from any respect or attachment, but that fear had brought some—craftiness others—lucre not a few—expectation many—and interest all.

The English yeomanry too, who fronted the foreign guards, looked as if but mocked and insulted by the strong body of the foreign adventurers behind them, in reality the real guards of the court; while they were almost derided by the hearts of those who looked upon them.

Close, too, to the very throne, separated from the minions who crowded closely round their patron, but by the royal pages in waiting, were those bloody miscreants, the infamy of John's

court, and the disgust and detestation of his people, ready to obey his fellest will, eager to imbrue their murderous hands in human gore, and whose gaudy habiliments but added to the sickening horror of their appearance.

And the king's heart, buried as it was in gorgeous splendour, and masked as was his face with fairest sunshine, what was it?—the gathering volcano around whose clear summit the eagles soar in fearless safety, and on whose peaceful base the timorous herds seek the scanty verdure without an apprehension, while within, consuming fires and raging whirlwinds are struggling for renewed devastation, and the wild agony of their rumblings is ill restrained—such were, indeed, a weak emblem of that ruthless breast.

But the pageant went on, and the sunshine continued, and there were some—in appearance many, pleased countenances—and many smiles, too—and much profession—and innumerable promises. And there were also many com-

plaints—many murmurings—much expressed indignation — much almost threatened revenge.

And the king knew how correctly founded were those complaints—for his own injustice was the occasion of them ; and he guessed how false were those promises—even as his own professions were but empty words ; and he felt how treacherous were their smiles—for the sunshine on his own brow was a lie unto his heart ;—and yet the hypocrite smiled on—he smiled as if with an angel's smile, while there was a devil at his heart.

“ My lord, my lord,” exclaimed the haughty Duke of Ramsay, who, silencing many humbler petitioners, had preferred his complaints more in the manner of an equal than a subject, “ injustice such as this can never answer in the land—none but the basest slaves can endure it.”

“ We think,” replied the king, restraining his irritation, and speaking in his wonted placid

voice, " my Lord of Ramsay forgets in whose presence he stands."

The duke drew proudly up, and in a tone of bitter sarcasm returned, " No, my lord,"—he looked superciliously at the supporters of the royal state—" it were impossible to forget that —Pointz Fitz Allan has been too long a courtier, and has seen too much of royalty in the noble Richard's, and the good King Henry's time, to forget when majesty's vivifying aspect is upon him."

" My lord duke," exclaimed the Earl of Strigul, who, perceiving the workings of his master's countenance, dreaded some awkward explosion, " methinks some little courtesy to thy sovereign liege would as well become the noble Ramsay, as this almost insult."

" Insult, didst thou say, most excellent Pembroke," returned the duke, " what ! is truth so rare in these kingly halls, that it seems to you as insult ? Hear me, my Lord Pembroke, I come to the chief magistrate of Eng-

land for justice—I, as a vassal of the crown, prefer my complaint to my liege lord. If what I have averred be false, or my claim to these lands be unjust, prove it ; and despite my own opinion—despite the king’s promise, doubly assured by the favours he has accepted from me—I am content to submit ; but if my claim be just, why, my lord, in the name of Heaven is my right withheld, and I amused with pitiful evasions ?”

“ Less heat, my lord, and some little patience,” suggested the Archbishop of Canterbury, who stood at the king’s right hand ; “ your claims are not denied, and justice is even now in the course of being awarded.”

“ Most ghostly father,” retorted the unbending Ramsay ; “ I thank thee for thy honey words ; but, my lord, ’tis not words that will now content me : I must have deeds, and I humbly wait the king’s decision.”

The duke paused, and there was a stillness in the chamber, as if the breath of each was

drawn in, lest the mere respiration might disturb the silence.

The king, for a moment, leaned his head carelessly on his hand, in the attitude of consideration, and Albert, who stood close behind the royal chair, and whose sense of hearing was peculiarly acute, distinctly heard him whisper to the chief justiciary,

“It cannot be *now*—we hold Lord Howard by none other tie than these lands.”

“But, my liege,” returned the justiciary, in an equally low whisper, “Howard’s strength is not a tithe of this imperious duke’s.”

“My Lord Justiciary,” replied the king, with hasty warmth; “Howard is our friend—you have our determination.”

And instantly raising his head, he addressed the duke:—

“Your grace must pardon us, if even for so loved a cousin, we break not those rules, which our trusty council have in their wisdom laid down for the good of all. My lord, start not

with this ready choler—your lands shall be restored, though not in that indecent haste, which your impatience deems essential. We hold, indeed, the sword of justice, and when we wield it, it shall be with a firm, impartial hand. My Lord of Howard keeps not these lands, but from believed, however erroneously believed, right; nor can we eject him without the due process of our laws. We require, therefore, our cousin Pointz Fitz Allan's patience, and also that he will prove to us his zeal for our person by the support of a true and loyal subject."

Ramsay bowed with much hauteur, then raised himself proudly up, and without a word, withdrew from the presence.

Again Albert heard the royal whisper.

"Take care, my Lord Justiciary, that the haughty duke is watched, and if he proves dishonest—"

But the king's attention was suddenly arrested; he started with astonishment, nor

seemed scarcely able to credit that he beheld.

The princely Northumberland stood before him—the most powerful of his turbulent barons—the wary circumventor of his best plans for the curtailment of that unwieldy power—his almost personal enemy, whose life he had often held cheap at the cost of half his kingdom—was thus strangely in his power, and scarcely could he refrain his savage joy at the thought. With the convulsive violence of one who, in the acutest anguish of pain, strives to contain his agony, he forcibly clenched the arms of the royal chair, until his nails seemed almost to have indented it, as with a voice trembling with agitation, yet tinged with a bitter taunt, he exclaimed—

“What! the noble Percy here? This is, indeed, an honour of the which our poor court little deemed itself worthy.”

“Our royal cousin is pleasant with his servant,” returned the subtle earl, unmoved at the

king's evident disorder ; " that Percy's attendance at his sovereign's pleasure is so rare is no fault of his ; he seldom comes, where his presence is not desired."

" Now, by our holy mother church, Percy, thou wrongest us," returned the king, in a less disturbed, though still sarcastic voice ; " there are few whom we had rather seen than thy good self, for much we need thy efficient aid and counsel. My Lord Northumberland, a foreign and a mighty foe threatens us, and we would have the strength of our kingdom at our command : good my lord, we sent also to thee, and as yet wait thy tardy reply—do we then flatter ourselves foolishly, when we think that this unlooked-for courtesy brings to us thy duty ?"

" My liege," proudly returned the earl, " the Percys have never failed in all due services to their sovereign — slaves, dread Sire, the Percys never were, nor ever will be."

“ My Lord Northumberland ! ” quickly called out several voices at once.

The earl paused for a few moments, and looked calmly around, as if for some more explicit declaration, ere he demanded,

“ Well, my most noble lords, what is your good pleasure ? ”—but no one offered to reply, and he proceeded : “ Again, I say the Percys never will be slaves—and who is he that dares aver the contrary ? ”

“ My lords,” impatiently called out the king, “ we charge you peace—vex not our noble guest, we would hear the Percy speak—my Lord Northumberland, what is it that your words imply ? We would have a simple and a direct answer, my lord.”

“ My liege, your pleasure is my law—if, my lord king, your vassal paused in obeying your behest, it was not from any want of inclination, but from mere necessity. My liege, a certain baron, I ween, somewhere about this royal court, unjustly keeps the wardship of my fair

kinswoman, the Lady Eveline, although long time since has the lady attained a proper age for the assumption of her lands ; the lady, too, has herself already supplicated your grace's interference, and the Dames Margaret and Alice, her cousins, are your highness' hostages, for the payment of the two hundred head of poultry, stipulated as the terms of the royal influence."

"Thy items, Percy," abruptly interrupted the king, by no means pleased with this allusion to his secret dealings, "are somewhat over-minute ; we will dispense with their further mention—to what purpose, too, is this allusion to the Lady Eveline's wardship ? We spoke of thy duty to ourself, and again we require to know, my lord—"

"My liege," interrupted the earl, "Percy but waited until he learnt how the royal word had sped ; he cannot, my lord, leave his kinswoman's lands in abeyance ; and he therefore humbly presents himself before the throne to

learn the royal decision, that his own poor services may be at once prepared."

The king's rage almost prevented his listening to the Earl of Northumberland's speech ; each word of which, from the deriding tone and mock humility in which it was uttered, was as fuel to a raging furnace.

" 'Sdeath ! my lord," he furiously exclaimed, no longer able to repress his rage ; " is it thus thou darest the majesty of England ? Look to thy head, proud Percy ; thy saucy tongue may, perhaps, not wag so loudly some twelve hours hence—guards, seize the traitor !"

" Hold, miscreants !" called out the earl in a voice of a thousand thunders—the effect was as magic—no one stirred ; when Percy, advancing a step forward, lowly bowed towards the throne, and added with even more taunting humility,—“ Most gracious Sire, my royal mistress, the queen Isabella, has deigned this day most condescendingly to visit my poor countess, and I am pledged to an instant re-

turn to her grace; it would, dread Sire, be extremely inconvenient to her highness, were my return to be deferred."

John started aghast—confusion so staggered him, that he was speechless—but it was the silence of maddest disappointment. His prey stood in his very grasp—his hand had been actually stretched forth to crush him—and he was not only withheld from his power—but what was far worse, he stood before him, insolent in his safety, exulting in the rage he had occasioned.

"My liege," continued the earl, after a silence of some minutes, "I trust will reconsider his harsh decision—justice, my lord king, and my true services are yours—deny me, and that injustice incapacitates me for my duty." He again paused.

"Your majesty," whispered the Earl of Strigul, "had better comply; the earl is in himself an host."

"Madness! damnation!" returned the king,

more with a low groan than a whisper ; “ if I do, Roger Mallet and his aids are gone.”

There was a sudden start behind the throne, as if of some strange surprise ; it was instantaneous in duration, perhaps, too, unobserved, but it was followed by a trembling consciousness, that induced the starter warily to withdraw some little further back.

A few words were again whispered by the justiciary, and again replied to by the king in the same cautious under tone, which Albert, from his now increased distance, failed to learn—when the former instantly addressed the expecting earl.

“ My Lord of Northumberland, the King’s pleasure is that you instantly quit the royal court, and pay your respectful attention to his august consort—with respect to your demands, my lord, I have not at present his majesty’s decision.”

The earl bowed slightly, and instantly turned to withdraw ; at the same time, that the king

hastily rose, and passing o'er the very spot on which Albert had stood, glanced for one moment a look of deadliest intent towards one of the fiend-like miscreants, who stood behind the throne—(the page caught, and well understood that glance), and then hurried from the presence chamber.

He hastened to the queen's apartments to satisfy himself of the truth of the earl's assertion, ere his victim had escaped from his grasp. He there found evidence enough of its correctness, for her highness' messenger had just arrived to intreat the royal interference to rescue her from the questionable situation, into which she had been entrapped, through the seeming devotion of the Countess of Northumberland to her person.

The king stamped for rage—tore the hair from his head in the bitterness of his disappointment—cursed his young queen with savage curses ; and, throwing himself on a couch in her apartment, buried his face in the cushions, and

there waited her return in a stupor of vexation.

The noble Percy left the court, and the queen, not long afterwards, returned to it ; and there were revilings, and reproaches, and penitence, and tears—and then forgiveness—for despite John's dissoluteness, his passion for the lovely Isabella was not yet abated, and her many charms at length beguiled him of his anger.

That evening, too, a dark and ferocious looking fellow, bearing the royal badge, was found dead in the environs of Northumberland Castle, in those days, a strong fortress not far from Winchester ; a dagger was in his heart, and on it were the arms of Percy—men guessed who he was, and what the motive that had taken him to the spot, but they said nothing ; no one cared even to touch his unsightly carcase—the next morning it was gone.

Nor had Albert been idle : stealing quietly from the presence-chamber, almost as the king

left it, he had sought his friend Phœdrus, and the dark sayings of that weaver of sentences had not fallen unheeded on certain noble ears that heard them.

CHAPTER IX.

"Gold, yellow, glittering, precious gold."

Timon of Athens.

IN a mean obscure part of the city, and in a house, neither whose outward look nor the scanty provision of whose interior, bespoke aught but poverty and need, lived Roger Mallet, or as he was more familiarly called by those who knew him, Roger the Miser. A man whose very life was money, and whose soul was gold.

When a very child, his saving habits had

begun, and he would abstain from the merest gratification, if it but seemed to heap up his little hoard ; nay, he would rather behold his very sweets moulder and perish from disuse, than suffer his infant appetite to taste them. The same feeling ruled him through life, and but increased with his growth ; “ money—money ” was his constant cry.

Roger's origin was both proud and noble, his progenitors were closely allied to the Saxon royal blood, and had suffered nothing in their high martial fame, by their determined resistance of the Norman conquerers. In their consequence indeed they had suffered ; of their wealth and lands too, had been not slightly curtailed ; still, though insulted and degraded in their rank, and pilfered of their estates, they were far more fortunate than the bulk of their compeers, in being able to transmit even a wreck of their property to this dilapidated scion of their house. But with this patrimony came none of their proud un-

bending spirit, none of their restless impatience of wrong; the overbearing insolence and unceasing contumely, with which the Normans still treated their Saxon brethren, had blunted his finer feelings, and, in place of provoking their further rapacity by the ireful vituperations, in which his countrymen vented their indignation against their oppressors, he prudently sought the best and snuggest plan to secure that he already possessed from all useless peril, and, it might be, panper the sordid craving of his soul with a golden banquet.

He sold his lands, turned his patrimony into ingots, and in the counting o'er his money-heaps found far more content, than lands, or vassals, or empty honours, or the proudest memory of his ancestors had ever given him.

But Roger was wary—the violence of the times, the oppressions of rapacious and needy kings made him fear that, although but a Saxon and not a Jew, their tender mercies

might visit him and mar his golden transports ; Roger therefore was poor and needy to all but himself, and, among the vulgar he passed for a wretched and miserable outcast, the victim of oppression and the sufferer by unjust violence.

But however he had flattered himself of the success of his management, Roger's wealth, among certain of the great ones of the land, had both been suspected, and suspected too to a conviction that had made it certainty : and being in that convenient, and in those days, rare form, which rendered it so peculiarly desirable for the many sudden purposes and rash schemes continually on foot, Roger had escaped neither supplications, nor entreaties, nor demands, for the occasional use of his treasure. But the wary miser had still held to his god—supplications and entreaties he minded not—demands he evaded by protestations of poverty ; to all he pretended most abject need, though, occasionally, when a tenfold security and as ample bribes were tendered, was the

money forthcoming, always however under a strict pledge of secrecy, and as not from his own means, but from the charity, as he protested, of some Flemish money-lenders.

Roger had found by experience, that it well answered his purpose thus to assist the necessitous; and from time to time he had so enlarged his dealings, that at length he had had transactions, not only with most of the needy of his own land, but with many foreigners, even with princes, though still always as the mere agent of the wealthy Flemings. If the terms were strictly adhered to, his friends were again ready to assist; if not, no second bribe could tempt them. By such wariness he managed to secure the good, and to get rid of the bad without much loss or trouble; and he chuckled o'er his fastly-growing heaps with contented satisfaction, although with their increase, they brought not one single gratification, beyond the joy wherewith his fingers told their amount.

It was to this man, that a slight, muffled form was seen stealing in the evening twilight ; if indeed there was aught particular in his appearance, it was the extreme youth which, in spite of his disguise, was so plainly evident. He seemed to be well acquainted with old Roger's habits, and on good terms, too, with his domestic, or he would not have been so readily admitted ; for few ever passed, or at least were known to pass his miserable threshold. Admitted however by the ancient Deborah, the wretched man's wretched factotum, he at once passed through the cheerless space which formed the apartment, wherein both master and servant lived or seemed to live their scanty days, and without further hesitation entered a second apartment leading from the former.

Here, seated on one of the two stools, which, together with an ancient, almost crumbling desk, a wretched pallet and one large oaken chest, formed the entirety of its embellishments, he found the miser, in habiliments

which, from their care-worn aspect, seemed to have rendered him an even better service than the tottering desk, which, in contempt of the many bungling attempts to mend it, and of which it bore ample evidence, each moment threatened a total demolition, to the certain discomfiture of its ancient master, whose zealous pressure on its top, would no doubt have added materially to the effect of the catastrophe.

“Walk in, walk in, Master de Bourgh,” called out a querulous voice, as the comer paused for a moment at the door; “ye’re always welcome, for the good Hubert thy father’s sake—ay, ay, young man, in my younger days, many has been the good hour that Hubert de Bourgh has fought in my behalf and risked his life for mine; ah! those were fine times indeed, for our good Henry then reigned over us, and he was a righteous prince, and oppressed not the poor, nor troubled the destitute.”

“Blessed be his memory,” returned his

young listener with animation ; "he was a good and a virtuous prince, Master Mallet, would to God we had the like of him now !"

"It were, Master de Bourgh," rejoined the old man, "a thing indeed to be desired, though to one so wretched as poor Roger Mallet, it matters not who reigns ; poverty, young man, is a jealous tyrant, a hard master, and rarely lets its slaves feel any other rule."

"Come, come, Master Mallet," said the youth ; "Hubert de Bourgh's son knows a different tale from that ; you surely forget our last conference ?"

"Our last conference !" repeated the old man in some alarm, as if he almost feared to find himself betrayed into some inconvenient disclosure ; "forget it indeed ! nay—nay, I remember it well enough—'twas all about my distresses—let me see, was not your good father to send me some small pittance for my relief ? and so the good man has sent it by you ?" and fixing his eyes stedfastly upon his amused

listener, he gradually averted his face, until his eye-balls turned so far round, as to be almost buried in their sockets.

“ Yes, yes, Master Mallet,” returned Albert, smiling at the old man’s attempted management; “ you may well look askance at me, when you know you almost promised to give us your mighty aid on the terms yourself proposed.”

“ Go to, Master de Bourgh,” quickly interrupted the miser, some little off his guard through his apprehension of having really given a promise, the obligation of which former associations caused him to acknowledge, “ thou knowest ’twas no promise; I wanted some more tangible pledge, something that I could feel—I can count my money, young man—”

“ Oh ! Master Mallet,” interrupted Albert in his turn; “ then after all you have the money ?”

The old man looked astounded, and he

looked twice too, ere he demanded in an almost trembling voice, "Money, young man! who told thee I had any money?"

"Who told me indeed?" replied Albert; "who but thyself, good Master Mallet? Be-think thee of the five thousand golden marks thou wast to have for the loan of the ten thousand that we want from thee."

"Ten thousand golden marks!" exclaimed the wily Roger, in apparent excess of astonishment, "ten thousand marks of gold from such a wretch as me!"

"And to return them to you," rejoined Albert, as if not noticing his exclamation, nor the doubt wished and intended to be conveyed, "along with the five thousand additional, being the consideration for the loan, as soon as the Duke of Brittany overthrows the usurper of his rights."

"Five thousand additional?" repeated the miser, his eyes sparkling with joy, as his imagination told their amount, "five thousand

marks, premium, as my excellent patrons the Flemish bankers would say—a most desirable, a most excellently good thing, Master de Bourgh—five—” he stopped suddenly short, and his countenance fell most woefully from the exultation of the previous moment, as, in a tone of bitter disappointment, he added, “but the pledge, young man—the pledge?”

“The prince’s bond,” vehemently answered the youth, “the sacred word of the whole combination, King Philip’s royal assurance to see it paid.”

The old man shook his head very sorrowfully; he waited for a moment in the hope of some further security being offered, and when he saw that Albert had finished speaking, he sighed most deeply, as he replied—

“The prince is a fine young man, no doubt, and his bond may be all very good,”—Albert’s blood mantled to his brows at the doubt which seemed to be implied rather than expressed by the miser’s hesitation—“and words—even sacred

words, Master de Bourgh, they sound well, though they may be but as marks made on the sea-shore, and the next tide doth wash them out. King Philip's assurance too—I'll not gainsay his Majesty, but although his royal promise is something, 'tis not quite enough for ten thousand golden marks—ten thousand marks of gold, young man, is a vast deal of money, and not to be picked up every day."

"True, true, Master Mallet," replied Albert with much calmness, to a mode of reasoning, already a hundred times repeated; "but consider the recompense—five thousand golden marks is no small sum."

"That's true enough, young man, very true, 'twould almost buy a kingdom." Roger spoke very musingly.

"Nor would so much have been offered," continued Albert, perceiving his advantage, "had the security been, as you say, more tangible."

"Thou speakest very sensibly, Master de

Bourgh—very sensibly indeed ; as my excellent patrons, the Flemings would say, small risk, small premium—large risk, large premium—there is certainly a vast deal of sense in thy words.”

“ Then listen to them, good Master Mallet, and at once say content ; I know you like the cause in your heart, if other matters did not deaden it there ; don’t let it languish for the lack of a few pitiful marks.”

“ A few pitiful marks !” exclaimed the miser, his eyes almost starting out of his head with astonishment—“ a few pitiful marks !”

“ In comparison only, good Master Mallet,” quickly rejoined Albert, aware of his error, with a propitiating look, “ a whole world of gold were nothing to such a cause.”

“ Umph !” retorted the old curmudgeon, “ can’t exactly say ; that’s just as people think ; I like the cause well enough, it is true, but ten thousand golden marks, Master de Bourgh, is a vast deal of money—have you any notion how long it would take even to count it ?”

Before, however, Albert could reply to this somewhat posing question, there was a noise in the adjoining apartment, as of some intrusion, which promptly stopped their further conversation : and he almost instantly detected a certain well-known voice, as in careless, bantering tones, its owner amused himself at the expense of old Deborah's dilapidated appearance.

The old miser seemed equally paralyzed ; he motioned Albert to silence, and for some moments appeared lost in perplexity. It was soon evident that the intruder was determined to advance into the room in which they were, in spite of the old hag's oft-repeated affirmation of her master's absence.

Roger started as from a trance, and leaning nearer to his companion, whispered in a low cautious voice,

"He must not find *thee* here—'tis Master Santer ; 'twould discover all."

Albert motioned to the huge chest by which he stood, for, as yet, he had not dreamt of the

possibility of escaping from a discovery that seemed so inevitable; but Mallet shook his head; he seemed dreadfully distressed, as if some internal struggle kept him uncertain how to act. He once or twice half raised himself from his seat, and then again sunk back, as if still hesitating in his purpose—as if he could not bring his mind to submit to it. It was the work of a minute—the voice came nearer and nearer—Albert still saw no means of escape, for the small windows, themselves scarcely large enough to afford a way of egress, were doubly barred, and there appeared no other resource. Aware of his real danger, and hearing the footsteps now at the very door, he roused himself from the dizzy stupor in which the extremity of his danger had sunk him, and whispered to the hesitating Mallet—

“Save me, good Master Mallet—if there be any pity in you, hide me from this wretch, unless indeed you wish to see me dead at your feet.”

The old man started up towards the door—but, at the same moment, the steps again receded a pace or two ; little promise however was there in the pause, for the determination of the intruder still seemed fixed to satisfy himself of the truth of old Deborah's assertions by entering the room.

"Can I trust thee, young man?" hurriedly demanded the Miser, in a voice trembling with doubt and apprehension ; "thy life is indeed at stake, and I would save it—thy father once saved mine—but I can only do it by risking my own ; wilt thou promise—"

"I swear—" interrupted the agitated youth.
"Never to divulge what thou shalt see?" the old man dropped his voice to an even lower moan—"an old man's peace, nay, his life may depend upon it—"

"Willingly do I swear it," returned Albert, almost breathless with growing fear, for the intruder's hand was now on the very latch, "but pray you speed, or it is too late."

The old man had already touched a secret spring, and a small pannel in the wainscot flew open, through which Albert, without further hesitation, speedily crept, and, in less than a second, found himself delivered from his imminent peril and in almost utter darkness.

He looked around him, and as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, soon discerned by the faint light which the narrow loop-hole, the only opening in the walls, permitted to enter, that he was in a small narrow chamber, entirely empty, but which, nevertheless, seemed from its cleanliness to be more than occasionally made use of; and instantly did a thousand strange conjectures as to the nature of such occupations, pass through his mind; though all of them indirectly or directly, resolved themselves into the conviction, that they had some reference to the concealment of the miser's vast wealth.

But his conjectures, however rapidly they had darted across his imagination, were not half finished, when his attention was arrested by the

salutation of the intruder, which he could distinctly hear through the closed pannel.

“So thou’rt not out, old grumpy, after all, eh? I knew the old witch was lying; for I heard thee all the while, as plainly as if I had been in the room with thee.”

Old Roger however seemed to think otherwise of Master Santer’s hearing abilities, simply replying to the former part of his observation, which he did in so weak a voice, that Albert could scarcely connect his words—

“I am very sick to-day, Master Santer—very sick indeed;” he coughed most violently, “this asthma almost tears me to pieces, and I wished to get some sleep; poor Deborah did quite right—the only peace such poor afflicted wretches like me have, is in sleep.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed out his companion, “still the same—always in the same tune, good Roger? Very, very poor, and very, very ill—when thou knowest thou’rt as rich as Croesus, and as strong as Hercules; go to, go to, man,

thou should'st buy one of those talking-birds, and teach it thy tune; 'twould save thee a world of breath, and spare thy poor lungs that terrible—" and he imitated to the life Master Mallet's wheezy cough.

"Thou art very hard on a poor old man," returned the miser in the same moaning tone, "to gibe him thus, when want and misery so encompass him."

"And this ample chest," continued the other, striking it somewhat heavily, "stands staring thee in thy face, and thou seest, even through its massive case, the golden stores within—Come, come, Roger, enough of this; I want some plainer speech with thee—" he stopped suddenly, and then demanded in a lower tone, as if the miser had made some sign to him—"what mean you?"

"Speak lower,"—Albert could hardly catch the old man's reply—"I am not quite so sure of old Deborah."

"Oh, the old witch," returned his companion,

"the traitor ! she 'peach ? we'll burn her for sorcery, Master Mallet—by the powers, she'll blaze like touchwood, starved and shrivelled as she is."

"Nay, nay, Master Santer," intreated her master in an anxious and less cautious tone, "I meant not so far as that, old Deborah is faithful and honest too—she is only a little curious, and so—"

"I understand," returned his listener in a somewhat lower tone, that seemed to content the old man, but which Albert still overheard, "to the point then—thy promised aid—"

"*Promised*, Master Santer !" called out the old man in less measured tones.

"Promised !" returned his companion in apparent surprise at his interruption—"to be sure—promised—said I not right ?"

"Ay, when the last loans were paid up, 'twas to be, Master Santer, as well thou knowest."

"But I must have them now, good Master Roger."

“Tis no use talking of *wusts*, Master Santer; thou knowest my excellent friends, the Flemish bankers, will not stir a step on any other than their own conditions.”

“Nonsense, man, they must, and they shall—now hear me, worthy Roger; thou knowest what I can do for thee—and that, without me, thou would’st not be safe a single instant.”

“And thou knowest too, Master Santer, what my good friends can do for thee, though thou wottest not what more I can advantage thee.”

“Ah! what mean you?” hastily demanded his companion—but the miser’s reply was in so low a whisper, that Albert’s strained hearing could not catch it; nor could he make out the observation which it elicited from Master Santer, as he too seemed at once to adopt the same cautious tones.

Albert’s perplexities increased—what could the old wretch mean by that secret communication? had he been all along dealing with him in

a twofold capacity, and only trifling with his confidence that he might turn it to his own advantage by selling it to his foes ; or if really honest and his professions no lie, did he repent the humanity which had caused him to disclose his hidden retreat, and was he plotting to secure its secrecy by obtaining his destruction ? He instantly looked about him to see if there was no escape from so doubtful an ally. His eyes were now well accustomed to the gloom of his prison—for such indeed it looked, and his fears almost decided it so in reality ; and immediately were they fixed on a small ladder in one corner of the room reaching from the floor to the ceiling. He listened again at the pannel by which he had entered, but the same whisperings still continued ; and believing himself in fastly-increasing jeopardy, he determined at once to examine to what advantage the ladder could be applied, although the only prospect which it seemed to promise him was the slight chance of obtaining some assistance by making

known his situation to any chance passer by, through the small loop-hole which gave light to the dismal chamber. Upon reaching the ladder, he found it affixed firmly to the wall ; it instantly however struck him, that it would not have been so placed but for some use, and he at once began cautiously to climb it ; it led to a small trap-door in the ceiling, fastened tightly down by a small spring latch, which readily yielded to his pressure, and, lifting up the door, he found himself in a low loft, which extended the whole length of the building. He immediately passed through the aperture, and was gently lowering the trap-door, lest by any accident it should fall down and betray his movements, when, just as he was placing it carefully on the opening, it slipped from his fingers and instantly closed.

CHAPTER X.

"For by oppressing and betraying me
Thou mightest have sooner got another service;
For many so arrive at second masters."

Timon of Athens.

ALBERT felt no slight alarm at being thus unexpectedly shut from all possibility of retreat, and his first and instant anxiety was to ascertain whether the secret door had actually re-fastened itself in its fall; but so ingeniously had it been contrived, that although conscious it must be immediately at his feet, he could not find even a trace of its actual position.

He looked about him, if possible to remedy the disaster by discovering some opening, that by leading to his escape would render retreat unnecessary ; and gliding softly over the rough scantlings, he minutely examined every corner, and scrutinized each gap in the dilapidated tiles in the hope of finding some propitious outlet.

But all was disappointment, there was not only no possibility of escape, but he was even farther from the chance of any assistance ; and he would now have hailed almost as deliverance, the narrow fissure, which in the apartment he had left, seemed to bring him within the hearing of human compassion ; whereas now, he was even more ruthlessly in the power of his bitterest foe, did Mallet treacherously betray him.

Still he was not followed, nor did any farther pause take place in the conference beneath him, which he could still hear as a low mumbling sound : and most bitterly, now that regret was worse than useless, did he regret his folly in

thus yielding to his apprehensions, and thereby increasing the perplexities, if not the dangers of his situation.

If Mallet was false, it little mattered whether he then escaped or not, as being exposed in his true character of a plotter against the present government, his fate was inevitable: and Mallet true, he had both placed himself in a situation that at once declared his distrust of him, and also had rejected a security, which, as well from its nature, as the estimation in which it was held, was no doubt effectual against every scrutiny as well as accident.

But the error had been committed, there was no retrieving it; and Albert's situation each moment became more confusing and cheerless.

The voices too below him grew louder and louder, as if in anger, and, to his other embarrassments, were added those, of a deep desire to learn the cause of their warmth, and a continued disappointment of his many fruitless efforts to effect that purpose. All at once, as he was

groping about, the voices seemed to reach him more distinctly from one particular spot ; he examined it more attentively, and, to his great satisfaction, found a small square hole in the floor, which, upon trying with his feet, he found to lead by a rude kind of ladder in the wall towards the lower apartment.

Thinking that it might probably be the opening to some private passage from the house, he groped his way from step to step with what noiseless caution self-preservation taught him, until he believed himself, judging from his descent, almost on a level with the ground ; when directed, as well by a bright light as if from some crevice, as by the increasing voices of the miser and his companion, to whom he had evidently approached much nearer than when at his former point of observation, he stealthily let himself down one or two other steps, and soon found himself at the termination of the novel staircase, and close upon what appeared to be a door, through the crevice in

which and close whereto, he could plainly distinguish Master Santer and the miser standing over the large oaken chest, before alluded to, in eager dispute.

The latter seemed pointing to the box, as if in attestation of something before said, and Master Santer was looking with his wonted bold effrontery, as if still dissatisfied : the chest was immediately before where Albert stood, but so close to the wall, that he could not from his scanty view see its contents.

"I confess, good Roger, I am satisfied," observed Master Santer, in a tone widely at variance with his words, "though I certainly did expect to find thee fibbing a bit, and some other object to pop up than those scurvy jerkins ; but still one's own senses, my worthy friend, are obstinate mules when they are sure of a thing."

"As you please, as you please," returned old Roger, in a tone of some little exultation ; "thou knowest, Master Santer, thou art a pri-

vileged man—privileged at one time to be great, at another time to be little, and at all times to be obstinate—ah ! ah ! ah !”

“ And thou too, most witty Master Roger,” replied the other, mocking the old man’s tone, “ art a privileged man, for thy money makes thee privileged at one time to be saucy, at another time to be saucy, and at all times to be very, very saucy—oh ! oh ! oh !”

“ Indeed !” retorted the old miser, by no means relishing the joke, and on a perfect equality with his companion—such indeed is the omnipotent effect of gold ; “ and having gained such important information, is there aught else that Master Santer would say to his grateful pupil ?”

“ Yes, good Master Mallet,” returned Master Santer, highly satisfied with having stirred up the old man’s bile, “ one small matter, egad. I had nigh forgotten—thou knowest, my lord of Tabley holds for thy behalf the wardship of the Lady Eveline Percy—”

"I do, Master Santer," impatiently, interrupted his listener, "for good and ample advances made to thee in sterling gold."

"True, old testy," continued the other; "no one doubted the goodness of thy metal, nor questioned its advance; but the lady is of age, and her estates can no longer be kept from her without certain inconvenient consequences to the state."

The very mention of the Lady Eveline's wardship seemed like a poker in a smoldering fire: the old miser's passion first faintly glimmered, then, each moment that Master Santer spoke, waxed stronger and stronger until it was now in a perfect blaze; his eyes at the same time dilated wider and wider, until they seemed ready to fly at the offender: it was all he could do to restrain himself until he had finished speaking; and then the smothered rage burst out but the more fiercely for its restraint—"What! want to rob me of that?—what! want to take away the only one of thy pitiful pledges, that ever

returned me one groat of the thousands, thou hast had from me? What!—hear me, Master Santer—if this vile injustice is attempted, nay, even if this subject is again alluded to, there's no use coming this way again—that's all;" and he nodded his head with the most impudent defiance.

But Master Santer seemed willing to submit even to this, and without noticing his heat, save in order to mitigate it, replied in a more persuasive tone, "Now don't be so rash, worthy Master Mallet, thou shall have ample other security; nay, if thou wilt, thou shalt have the whole of the extortioning Jews in the land made over to thee, to have and to fleece at thy good will, no man forbidding;—nay, even if thou roastest a few, no one shall gainsay it."

"I'll none stir a step," persisted the inflexible miser, though in a less angry tone—"not a jot will I budge—I know what's good and real, and I'll not change it for all the circumcised

in the world ; so let's no more about it. I was wrong, to be sure, to put myself in such a passion, Master Santer, but it will have a fling at times—we all like a bit of a puff occasionally.”

“Like enough, like enough,” returned the complaisant Master Santer, “but, by my hali-dome, good Roger, thine are squalls, not exactly puffs.”

At this moment there was an odd sort of a noise at the door of the apartment, and instantly afterwards old Deborah put her ancient face in and winked ; whereupon old Roger nodded in return, and soon put his ancient face out.

No sooner was his back turned than Master Santer commenced a zealous scrutiny of the apartment ; he first examined the floor, and stamping all over it, ascertained that all there was as firm as it appeared ; he next sounded the wainscot all round the room, even over the very pannel by which Albert had escaped, with-

out seeming to obtain one even dubious answer ; and he was almost passing the spot where the youth stood, and near to which he had commenced his questioning, when, as if by mere accident, his hand struck against the hollow door — “Aha ! the old lying rascal,” he muttered to himself, as he minutely examined the tell-tale pannel ; “grammercy ! but thy vile carcass shall smart for this ere I have done with thee ; I’ll teach thee better manners, let me but learn where thy shekels are laid up, or e’en catch hold of thy confederate—if that tale is not like all the rest, a lie ;” his very breath passed through the crevice as he spoke, so near was he to the door, and Albert felt it on his face—it was as if the palsying simoom had passed him by, and he almost fell back, sickened to the very heart with that pestilential vapour.

But the miser’s steps were heard rapidly returning, and Master Santer, instantly descending from his scrutiny, passed quickly across the

room, and putting on a negligent appearance, observed in a tone of seeming indifference, as the old man hobbled into the room—

“Thou needest not have hurried thyself, good Roger, there’s nothing I could have run away with, unless indeed, thine old chest, which is not worth the carrying, or I could have found out thy secret hiding-place—nay, for that I would e’en give thee another wardship, as good as thou knowest who’s: but I must leave thee, Master Mallet, already have I doubled my intended stay with thee.”

“I was obliged to treat thee somewhat uncereemoniously, Master Santer,” returned the old miser, in a more gracious tone; “a certain saucy churl would not quit unless I spoke with him; but if thou hast not aught else to say, thou knowest I am but an infirm old man, and soon knocked up, and this long conference of ours—”

“Has so knocked thee up,” interrupted Master Santer, in a jeering tone, “even as thou

wert explaining. Well, I'll go—but come, Roger, tell me, hadst thou not some other saucy churl with thee when I came in? I cannot yet be satisfied—thou really must have some snug hole to put such favored ones into, or thou must company with Beelzebub himself. Come, say, I'll never tell,” and as he spoke, he struck the treacherous wall, as if unintentionally, with his fist.

Its tell-tale rejoinder was actual dismay to the luckless miser; nor was a less despairing result felt by the trembling youth behind it, the extremity of whose condition kept him fixed to the spot; nor was it until Master Santer's exulting exclamation—

“By God's teeth, a lie! a false face! oh, the hollow cheat!” and the vigorous attack which he at the same moment commenced upon it, too evidently assured him that his danger was no fancied one, that, turning from the partition, he began to climb up the rude ladder as quickly as his dread of detection permitted him.

He heard, indeed, old Roger's solemn assurances, that it was nought but a closed-up cupboard, or some breach in the wall; but well guessing that Master Santer's present humour would not be stayed by any assurance of his, nor indeed by any proof short of ocular demonstration, he waited not for so futile a chance, nor paused until he had regained the loft—then indeed he paused, but it was only for the desolateness of the prospect that awaited him. There did not seem even a chance of secreting himself from any observation, much less from the so determined scrutiny that awaited him; the garret was entirely empty, and although the place was of itself dark enough, and the closing evening rendered that darkness even more obscure, there was still sufficient light to render visible its remotest corners to so resolute an investigator.

But inactive despair was as useless as it was foreign to Albert's character; something must be done—however slight its promise, some at-

tempt must be made, and that soon, for the short parley which had followed his abandoning his previous station, seemed to be followed by greater violence; and the successive blows, which fell quickly and heavily on the frail partition, foretold its speedy demolition. Albert's first movement was to creep as closely as he could, into what appeared to be the darkest corner of the loft; but no sooner had he covered himself up there, than he saw that such a hiding-place was rather giving himself to observation, than any concealment, and he at once sprung from it to another: that had even less promise about it; he looked up, but the single rough upright spar, and the two even ruder lateral ones, that supported the roof, offered scarcely a resting-place, much less a concealment, and he stood confused without even an idea how to dispose of himself.

It was at this moment, that the door, yielding at length to the zealous blows bestowed upon it, with one loud crash burst in; and the boisterous

laugh of the exulting Master Santer, at the same time told him that the secret stair-case was discovered.

"Aroynt thee, Roger, thou lying sinner!" he exclaimed, as soon as his turbulent mirth permitted him utterance; "and is this thy closed-up cupboard? this thy contrivance to keep out the cold draughts? Oh Roger, Roger, who would have thought thee such a deep one?—but come, let's e'en see which way the cold gets in, mayhap I may still further improve thy contrivance. Nay, nay, thou must lead the way, old man, despite thy seeming weakness, I'll be bound thou canst skip up those steps as nimbly as a cat."

"Pity, Master Santer," groaned the poor man, "pity—"

"Pity indeed," interrupted his companion, in a tone of harsher authority; "stuff—dost hear me, minion? lead on—thou hast cheated me once, 'twill be my own fault if thou dost it again—mount, I say."

And Albert heard as if he dragged the poor wretch across the floor, and pushed him to the opening: there seemed however no farther hesitation, for the old man, slowly indeed, but gradually, came climbing up the steps, closely followed by his companion, whose commanding tone was gone the instant that the purpose which called it forth was answered, and who now taunted his feeble efforts with cruellest mockings.

"Now, old boy, another step—by my soul how daintily thou do'st it; come, another hop with that nimble toe of thine; 'twas a sad mistake, Master Roger, that they made thee not a posture-master."

The old man, notwithstanding his many feigned and many real infirmities, managed very speedily to accomplish the ascent; and scarcely had he scrambled from the opening to the floor of the loft, than Master Santer, leaping over his head, stood beside him with his drawn sword in his hand (no doubt the inciter of poor Roger's strenuous exertions), and there stood

waiting for his expected antagonist. The old miser, however, still lay puffing and wheezing on the floor; and it might perhaps be a question, whether his indignation at Master Santer's violent usage, or Master Santer's disappointment, at the empty space that now met his inquiring looks, were the most intense. The latter feeling however at the instant, was certainly the more active; and when, in place of the suspected treasures, and the believed lurker that he looked for, he saw nothing but bare walls, and an empty loft (for Albert, almost at the instant that the pannel was struck in, had sprung upon the spar above the opening, having no better choice, and there lay, plainly enough to be seen, immediately behind the enemy who searched for him), he vented his wrath in innumerable curses; and stamping over the floor, at the same time that he minutely examined every joint, he gave way to his rage, until the very violence of his passion worked its own cure.

After so occupying himself for several min-

wres, he again returned to the old miser, who still had not quitted his recumbent posture, and in a more conciliating tone addressed him—

“I am wrong, Master Roger, at all events in part, but though I cannot convict thee, I do still distrust thee; let us however be friends and—but ha! for what dost thou brood so kindly over that favoured spot?” his suspicions seemed again alive; “another air-hole, eh? Up with thy carcase, thou Saxon churl—come, speed thee!” and as the poor wretch was raising himself, he spurned him with his foot, and threw him down.

The old man, though evidently hurt, uttered not a word, nor a complaint; he slowly raised himself, and, as his persecutor continued to hack the floor with his sword, as if bent on proving its solidity beyond every doubt, he stood immediately before him and directly opposite to where Albert lay. He had scarcely however stood upright, when he discovered the

youth's concealment, and an ill-suppressed exclamation of surprise burst from him.

"Ha!" instantly cried out Master Santer, looking fiercely up, "what means that surprise?" The miser's eyes were fixed on the ground, he answered nothing. "Oh!" continued his questioner, "it touches thee, does it? I thank thee, scare-crow, for the hint."

And he redoubled and maintained his attack on the unfortunate floor, until the light from the apartment beneath peeped through the breach, and Master Santer's strength and patience became both exhausted together.

"Now curse thy stubbornness, and thy mockings, Roger,"—he at length vented his disappointment in angry puffs, as, doffing his hat, he therewith fanned his reeking brows—"now hast thou not, out of the very wilfulness of thy heart, given me this useless heat? and yet thou hast not even the grace to say thou'rt a jot sorry for it?"

But still Roger answered nothing, and

Master Santer looking up stedfastly in his face, and readily guessing from his fixed sullen looks, the fact of the deep resentment that ruled him, passed at once from anger to merriment, and laughing heartily he again addressed him—

“Go to, go to, Master Roger, don’t let us quarrel for this little fling; thou knowest we all like a bit of a puff occasionally.”

Still Roger spoke not, and Master Santer, in even a still more gracious manner entreated,

“Forgive and forget, Roger; come, let’s be friends again.”

“Never,” returned the miser in a low trembling tone that spoke the workings at his heart, “never.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the scowling Master Santer, in accents but little less bitter, “I fancy thou hadst better re-consider that point, my friend.”

But the miser answered not again, nor did Master Santer at this time wait for his reply;

but passing quickly over the floor, he struck with his sword against a projection in one of the beams, as if some sudden thought had occurred to him, and then turning sharply round, stood for some moments lost in deep meditation, and to appearance looking earnestly before him, full on the spot where Albert was lying.

This seemed to him the crisis of his fate : so far he had escaped, though almost by a miracle, for so plainly was he exposed to view, that the merest glance must have betrayed him ; nothing indeed but Master Santer's earnest scrutiny of the floor, that had kept his eyes affixed thereto, had been his preservation ; now however they were no longer so fixed, and they not only looked up, but seemed actually settled upon him. And as Albert lay and watched their piercing gaze, and thought what might be the next act of the ruthless spirit that directed them ; what he might himself be, even that same minute that he thought it, a sickening horror struck through his soul

and already he felt the murderer's blade pierce through him; his heart almost ceased to beat, and his curdling blood crept slowly through his veins with painful convulsiveness; the countenance of his believed murderer, at each instant, seemed more frightfully hideous, to start unnaturally forward from his body, and dance about in dizzying mazes—now the whole place swam round with him, and there was a tenseness on his forehead that was agony. He was conscious that he moved—that same instant did Master Santer start, as if with some new impulse, and hurriedly advance from where he stood.

Albert saw no more, he had instantly closed his eyes, and his only consciousness was a heavy weight on his brain, and a painful throbbing at his heart—oh! how horrible was that consciousness! but still he moved not again, nor cried he out for that anguish, but silent and motionless as death did he lie. So too, now, was all around him, he believed

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himself murdered—dying—dead; and the breathless stillness the silence of the grave, and the gnawing at his heart, and the iron pressure on his skull, the first gripe of death's bony fingers on his frame.

A sudden noise disturbed him from that trance of horror—it grew louder and louder, but his confused senses understood it not; a gentler clasp was around him and seemed to lift him from his resting-place; but he dared not to open his eyes, terror still closed them with convulsing force;—now sweeter, kinder accents reached him; he looked quickly and confusedly up—and it was as if Heaven smiled upon him, when he found himself in the arms of his pitying foster parent.

CHAPTER XI.

"Yet he that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fallen lord,
Doth conquer him that did his master conquer,
And earns a place i' the story."

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN Hubert left his young friend, after his interview with the usurper, on the morning subsequent to their arrival at Winchester, his intention was, as he had declared, to have returned to him as soon as rest and quiet had sufficiently recovered him from the effects of the morning's ordeal.

But unlooked-for events had disposed of him

widely different from what he could possibly have known or divined.

He had scarcely ~~quitted the apartment~~ where Albert lay, than he ~~encountered the King~~, and naturally anxious to learn how his plans worked, as also to ascertain John's opinion of the youth's carriage whilst before him, he inquired, with seeming paternal solicitude, how far the boy's address had contented his grace.

"Excellently well, my faithful Hubert," replied the King, in great good-humour; "I don't believe the stripling at all suspected that it was his friend the palmer who spoke to him, though at one moment, indeed—"

"That was merely his fear, my liege," promptly returned Hubert, willing to draw John's thoughts from the only questionable feature of the interview — "Majesty burst too suddenly upon him—for I had in no respect disobeyed the injunction to secrecy, especially when his first glance told him of his freedom with your grace."

"By my halidome 'twas somewhat awkward for the lad, I must confess," replied John, musingly.

"He's but a youngster, your highness, and understands not dissembling," suggested Hubert.

"But if so, what says the boy for himself?" quickly demanded the King; "if he is so open in his countenance, 'twould follow that he should be as frank in his speech?"

"And so he is, my liege; rather too frank, as your highness knows, and as he himself feels; nought indeed but his sally at Master Santer's expense seems to perplex him."

"Go to, Master Chamberlain," replied John, with careless indifference, "he has little need to mind that sally if he fears not for others;" and he nodded significantly—"if, indeed, he had feared for them, although thy son, good Hubert, I must have provided for his safety in a manner that would have prevented him blabbing of that, so odd a chance had told him;

for although in our hearts we care not a jot for these churchmen, and believe them, notwithstanding their pretended sanctity, to be as fond of certain pleasures as other men, we would not, just at this juncture, add to our squabbles with their order by a scandal, as they would term it, that might perhaps tell against us, and most certainly perplex the holy and very accommodating sisterhood of St. Etheldreda."

"Your majesty may rest content on that head," returned De Bourgh, "and so may the pious sisters too, for I have cautioned the boy that such matters are as well not alluded to; nay, I have almost persuaded him out of his first quick decision."

"He is, I fancy, at most times over quick," observed the King; "his apt wit may perhaps bring him into worse scrapes than this; I would advise thee to caution him on that head likewise."

"Boys, my liege, will be boys," said De Bourgh, "and my busy life has left me little

leisure to correct his foibles ; if, however, your grace will but overlook his pertness, the boy will be no discredit to the royal state."

"If the women spoil him not, good Hubert ; but already is he in some peril that way, for his ready tongue hath, even now, wiled him into your royal mistress's favour ; let, however, his duty be well done and he shall lack not encouragement—But a truce—other more weighty matters command our notice. These imperious barons are coy of their preparations for our aid, nor sound their dull and lifeless promises as if there was really a spirit in them ; nay, some almost dare us, and confident in their strength, require from us certain inconvenient concessions, ere they will join our ranks against this wily Philip. Especially does the haughty Ramsay perplex us by demanding what we cannot grant, and in unmeasured terms, threatening our refusal, not only with the loss of his own strength, but even with the baneful use of his great influence among his neighbouring

lords. In spite, however, of my lord duke's insolence, we despair not of bringing him to his duty, and we can but content him with our royal promises, until it is convenient for us to grant him his claims."

"Fitz-Allan's pride, my liege, is his god," observed Hubert, perceiving that the King paused; "if what he asks is not suggested by that unyielding deity, your expectations may be realized; but if it be his pride that speaks his demands, I should doubt the result to be as favorable as your majesty would wish it."

"And it is his pride, good Hubert, his damnable pride that eggs him on. Nor is that our only difficulty; we have already required his instant and positive decision, that we may know how to deal with his grace—even by our own messenger's return have we demanded it; when lo! our officer is detained—instead of our expected answer, here comes Fitz-Allan's messenger to require—for curse on his humble and

submissive words, 'tis indeed a demand that he makes—that, ere he declares his purposes, we would give him, even by this self-same messenger our final answer as to his oft-asserted claims to Lord Howard's lands in Kent; and it asketh but small penetration to see that Ramsay's decision will be ruled by ours."

"It would certainly so appear, my liege," observed his listener, musingly.

"But I would foil my lord duke, good Hubert," continued the King, in growing warmth; "even with his own weapons would I defeat his schemes; his messenger shall, in turn, be detained, and by thee, our trusty Hubert, will we learn the proud Ramsay's inward mind—but thou must speed thee on thine errand, De Bourgh, though, its end attained, we tie thee not to any return but such as suits thy leisure; our messenger can bring the duke's reply."

"Your grace's pleasure shall be done," returned De Bourgh, as if the commission by no

means displeased him; "when may I have your highness' further instructions?"

"Even now, good Hubert; our road this mornning and thine lie for some hours' ride the same, and, time pressing, thou shalt know our further mind by the way; in a few minutes we shall be ready."

Though no little hurried by this sudden demand on his attention, and not slightly perplexed on Albert's account, to be thus prematurely separated from him, ere he had fully explained his views, or had satisfied his mind as to those features in his late conduct that certainly had a dubious appearance, and which the youth evidently had decided to his disadvantage, still De Bourgh, so far from regretting his prompt removal, seemed rather to hail it as a piece of good fortune that he should turn to profitable account, and without further hesitation set to work to prepare for his expedition.

This, with the hardy veteran, as far as his own ease was concerned, was soon effected, his

more anxious consideration was for the comfort and satisfaction of his young friend. He went softly to the room in which he had left him, to communicate the new plans thus unexpectedly opened to them, but finding him already in a soothing slumber, he forbore to disturb him. Sending therefore a message by one of the metrials for his more immediate satisfaction, he provided in as direct a manner as his short leisure permitted, for acquainting him with those additional objects, that would fall to his care through his absence; and then transferring his paternal vigilance to one, whom he knew to be worthy that high trust, his most anxious solistitude seemed satisfied, and he was ready equipped for his embassy, long ere the indolent John was prepared to accompany him.

Whatever De Bourgh's reflections might be, that thus led him cheerfully from a scene, which, as he had so often admitted, had opened so wide a field to the advancement of their best wishes, he was not for some time permitted to

dwell upon them, but was compelled to the less grateful consideration of the artful and tortuous policy, which his royal companion detailed to him as they rode gently onwards.

Released, however, at once of the monarch's company and his subtle instructions, for every idea of them had passed away, long ere the sound of the royal cavalcade had ceased to reach him, De Bourgh greedily returned, as an hungry man to an interrupted feast, to the more pleasing prospects which his own thoughts opened to him.

It may perhaps seem strange that one so near to John's person, so high in his estimation, and so unreservedly in his confidence, should be one of the main instigators, and the most active maturer of a deeply-laid plot against his crown and person, and, at the same time, not only maintain his footing with the usurper, but actually make his most secret policies a means of promoting his own plans; but various circumstances, some certainly intentional, but by

far the greater part accidental, had conduced to place him in such a position, that, rather as the tool of fortune, the mere doer of the work laid upon him, than any decided seeker of that work, he had become that he was.

Hubert de Bourgh was one of King Henry's favorite knights, he was at the same time his bravest warrior, his truest subject, and his most faithful friend; and amid the many distresses and trials, which the good king experienced, whether from treacherous foes or turbulent subjects, from proud priests or domineering prelates, or, more especially, from the disobedience and unnatural conduct of his sons, the faithful Hubert was his constant counsellor and support. Through him too, from his intimacy with the young princes, he had often communicated with his rebellious sons, when no other channel would have been open to him; and more than once had his persuasive influence moderated their violence and restored them to their duty. On the good

king Henry's death, his successor Richard, whose bitter compunctions for his horrible ingratitude to so kind a parent afflicted him even to tears, and caused him to cry out, as his parent's dead body bled at his approach, that he was his murderer, seemed to have no feeling more grateful than that of making what retribution he could to the lost, by doubling his favours on those objects of his father's love and esteem still left to him, and the faithful De Bourgh was not an exception to his generosity.

Known almost from childhood, to whom indeed he was indebted for his first knowledge of arms, that glory of his life, and by whose entreaties he had been spared from plunging deeper in the guilt of his parricidal treason, the generous and warm-hearted Cœur de Lion could not but love so congenial a mind, nor acknowledge his believed obligations, by unchanging kindness : Hubert therefore was to Richard, what he had been to Henry, and, during his

shortened reign, was the depository in which his wishes and the secret purposes of his heart were locked up. Many were the honours that he heaped upon him—more might they have been, had Hubert either asked or wished them, but De Bourgh was not ambitious, he loved his king, as he would a brother; and, in assisting to his happiness, found his truest satisfaction—a satisfaction far beyond wealth or any dignities.

It was from this reciprocal feeling, that those peculiar circumstances had existence, that had tended in the sequel to place him in the equivocal situation in which he found himself. Richard well knew, both from observation and experience, how little his brother John cared for any obligation, save what fear extorted from him; and he also saw from his base treachery to himself, how poor a prospect awaited the young Duke of Brittany, who as well perhaps from justice, as that his father Geoffrey, however dissolute his character, had

yet, what John had not—a heart, and was therefore preferable to him, had been declared his successor.

He sought therefore to secure for him what influence he could among the principal barons, obliged the ministers of his government to swear fealty to him, and took every public opportunity of speaking of him as their future sovereign. But still Richard felt that all this meant nothing, that, the bias of his authority withdrawn, the lukewarmness of some, the insincerity of others, and the perfidy of John, would at once defeat all his so anxious provisions; he therefore sought still further to strengthen prince Arthur's succession, and counteract the weakness and inexperience of his youth, by secretly leaving him a faithful and prudent protector, as well to preserve him from the wiles, as to stimulate exertions to repel the open violence, of his foes. Hubert de Bourgh was the individual appointed to this difficult trust; and with an oath, sincere as his own

heart, had he sworn ever to defend the young duke, to watch over him with a father's care, and by every possible and expedient means to preserve to him his kingly rights.

Too soon did that guardianship begin ; the noble Richard met a sudden and premature end before the walls of Châlons, and long ere the sad news had even reached De Bourgh, was the subtle John the acknowledged king of England. Hubert indeed neglected not his trust, and at once asserted Arthur's rights, but he was both staggered, and his zeal at the same time paralyzed by the production of king Richard's will, appointing John his successor : for, although he himself knew how base was that forged deed, it was an excuse for the deceitful, the indifferent, and the fearful, to decline the hazard of a contest : and he found himself, without a struggle, obliged to submit to a necessity, that no present means could overrule. But still Hubert neglected not his trust ; his young prince was brought to the

usurper's court, and there seemed surrounded by danger and exposed even to death, with no friendly hand but his to save him. He had not yet relinquished his appointments about the court, nor had John yet ventured to remove so old and so tried a friend of his family; and Hubert, as the only practicable means of preserving his oath, and saving his lawful sovereign from destruction, was compelled to a duplicity both foreign to his nature, as irksome in its performance. He pretended to be satisfied with John's claim to the throne; to forego young Arthur's rights, and be content to serve their base usurper, as he had his predecessor, as the chamberlain of the household. By such sacrifice of his fairer truth, he had not only mitigated the prince's captivity through the opportunities which his situation offered him, but in the end had promoted his escape from his doubtful bondage. And believing that his present condition still tended in the best possible manner to the ulterior ad-

vancement of his sworn duty, he had kept on the mask, and still submitted to a continuance of those harassing duties which his post compelled him to—still submitted to those more trying misgivings of his mind, that tortured him with the doubt, whether, even his oath and that great end to be attained, did actually excuse the deceit, even to so vile a traitor, of which he knew himself to be guilty.

He had still, though dejected by ill-success, and worn down by his mental doubts, prosecuted with a firm and unyielding industry—slow, indeed, was its progress—that great purpose for which he had sacrificed himself; he had watched for the disaffected, the injured, and the wavering, to secure their co-operation in the cause, and increase the strength of his now formidable party; and when John's fickleness and worthless duplicity, had added still further to the enemies whom his injustice had raised against him, Hubert organized a plan for an open and simultaneous rising of the

confederates, that promised to hurl the cowardly usurper from his throne and place the noble Brittany in his stead.

John, indeed, was aware of the plot, suspected many, for his soul was all suspicion, and had detected more ; but still the wary De Bourgh had escaped even the shadow of a doubt, for the dissolute John listened only to the tales of his minions, and wanted both energy and discrimination, save by the lowest arts, to gain any better information. He shrunk too from so ungrateful truths, where they forced themselves not on his notice, for even when known, he had not the courage, where the assassin's blade could not reach, to assert his authority ; and he cared not to have his hours of more congenial debauchery broken in upon by any threatening dangers, so long as the storm did not actually burst upon him.

Hubert, therefore, worked steadily onwards, nor omitted any means of adding to, or condensing the strength of his party,

which ingenuity could devise or fortune presented.

The projects of the confederation were at this time so far ripened, that a general meeting of its leaders had been appointed, as well to concert the plan of the rising as to receive, through the French king's ambassador, the assurance of his unyielding support of his son-in-law's rights, with the sketch of his intended operations in the approaching campaign, by which their own movements were in a great measure to be governed.

The day drew rapidly nigh, and Hubert, naturally anxious that every provision should be made for it, and no ally lost through the want of any exertions of his, had at once gladly embraced the usurper's embassy as a happy incident; not only giving him a certain leisure for his operations, which, otherwise taken, would have subjected him to remark, if not suspicion, but even opening a chance of gain-

ing, through John's very injustice, the support of the powerful Ramsay.

Nor did De Bourgh in any way neglect so good an opportunity ; even with the haughty duke he made no little progress, and the countenance and assured support that the many others gave him, amply contented his warmest wishes. But by one and all there was one condition subjoined, without which, and Hubert knew that it was no unreal need, they could not proceed—without money, even the warmest were unable to put their most zealous wishes into action ; and no sooner had Hubert advanced thus far, and seen the momentous importance of securing that necessary co-operator, than relinquishing for the time his other purposes, he hastened back to Winchester, as well to learn how far his young fellow-worker had progressed, as also to secure, if possible, the cordial assistance of Roger the miser, whose aid of itself would satisfy all urgent demands, but besides whom, such was the then impo-

verished state of the country, there was no second chance.

De Bourgh stole cautiously into the city, and promptly making for Master Mallet's habitation, had arrived there during its master's conference with the usurper. And anxious to avoid all loss of time, and at the same time fearful of being recognised, did he continue in the street; he had demanded to see the miser, to apprise him of his immediate return to him after his intended interview with Albert; when, learning how matters stood, and where the youth was bestowed, he had hid himself behind old Deborah's bed, and, on John's hurried and ireful departure; had instantly rushed to his foster-son's assistance.

Albert was still convulsed with fright, and the extremity of his anguish had so stiffened his arm round the spar that supported him, that it was not without difficulty that it was loosened. He lifted him carefully down, and speaking to him in accents of pity and tender-

ness, soon aroused him to the reality of his deliverance.

And then came many kind and mutual congratulations—then came too explanations of the past, and accounts of the present, and encouragements for the future—and long, and sweet, and animating was that conference, as when hearts, and hopes, and thoughts, unite in joyful, fearless confidence.

CHAPTER XII.

"I am mightily abused—I should e'en die with pity;
To see another thus—pray do not mock me."

King Lear.

NEITHER De Bourgh nor his companion were aware how long they had been thus conversing, when they were suddenly startled by a low, deep groan, as of some one in the extreme of agony.

"'Tis poor Master Mallet," exclaimed Albert, and instantly springing to the rude staircase, he hastened to his assistance.

The poor miser was seated before his desk,

with his eyes fixed vacantly on the broken panel, his head leaned upon his clenched fists, and in his anguish he had gnawed his withered hands, until the blood had sprinkled his hoary beard, and stained the ground. He stirred not at their approach, nor answered to their anxious inquiries after his hurt; he seemed sunk in an affliction too deep for words, in a torture too extreme for endurance. De Bourgh lifted up his head to prevent his further maiming himself; the movement seemed, in some degree, to rouse him, and as he gnashed his few remaining teeth, as if that agony would have forced them from their sockets, another groan burst from him, so deep and hollow, as if his very soul had then broke from him: he started from his bended posture, and smote his fists on the desk with such a blow—rage, and no natural strength of his had directed it—that its feeble boards shivered with the shock, and his hands trembled for the very acuteness of pain.

“Oh, curse him!”—the words struggled for

utterance, as if his rage were almost choking him, and he spoke them in so deep and sepulchral a tone, that they fell almost as shuddering horror on the ears of his listeners—"Oh; curse that hellish monster! If there be a torment in this world, such as devils feel, may it be his sweetest cup; and if in hell there be an agony, at whose very thought demons tremble, oh, may that agony for ever torture him, and eternity but add to its endurance!" Exhausted by the violence of the effort, he sunk down, and but for Hubert's support, would have fallen to the ground.

Albert was horrified by so terrible imprecation; even De Bourgh withstood not an influence which, perhaps as much from the manner of its utterance, as the curse itself, was so dreadfully exciting; nor was it until after a pause of several minutes, that he sought to cheer the old man from his abject abasement to a better feeling.

"Come, come, good Roger," at the same

time placing him more upright on his seat, "give not way to this madness, despise the reprobate, even as thou hatest him ; let not aught so vile perplex thee thus."

"Hubert," replied the old man, in a voice still trembling with ill-suppressed emotion, "the monster struck me—spurned me with his foot!"—he paused, and looked imploringly up—"as a dog, did he spurn me, Hubert"—he burst into a flood of tears, and as the bitter drops coursed down his pale cheeks, sobbed out, "I had not strength to tear the wretch to pieces, and there was no dagger in my hand"—he shook his bleeding fist with deadliest meaning, as quickly drying up his tears, he added, in a firmer tone,—“or I had struck the caitiff to the ground."

"Beshrew me, and rightly hadst thou served him, good Roger," rejoined De Bourgh, as soon as he saw that he had ceased speaking, "and thereby saved some generous souls a world of labour—but cheer up, my friend, and

let not his treatment thus make thee wretched, 'tis only what thousands have had to endure from the same hands."

"I have heard, good Hubert," returned the old man without seeming to notice his suggestion, a grin of savage delight quickly chasing away his previous tears—"I have heard that revenge is sweet—that to the spurned and injured wretch, 'tis as a new existence: such an existence shall now be mine; and oh! if my feeble hand can reach this ruthless villain,—if I can mar one of his schemes, or even assist to blight one single prospect on which his soul depends, I will be content."

"Go to, good Master Mallet," quickly replied De Bourgh, "why rest thyself with so small a limit of revenge, when thou mayest secure its highest consummation?"

"Ha!" impatiently demanded the miser, "what meanest thou?"

"Suppose there could be found a way to mar his dearest schemes, to blight his every

prospect, nay, to hurl the fell usurper from his throne, and, if not destroy him, consign him to a bondage worse than death—how wouldest thou receive it?”

“As salvation, Hubert, as a transport too great for words—already do I see it—already does the light break upon the darkness of my soul, and cheer it into noon-day gladness. Ah! ah!—the glorious consummation—the exulting rapture! ah! ah! and shall the tyrant indeed feel it?”—his voice suddenly fell to a hoarse muttering, as he added, “then tremble, thou monster, for retribution hangs over thee!”

“Ay! now this is as it should be,” exclaimed De Bourgh, “nor needest thou fear our completing thy desires: meet but our necessity, good Roger, with thy ample means, and doubt not our turning thy help to good account.”

“And thou shalt have it, good Hubert—to the last groat is it thine,”—he paused for a moment—“on one condition—”

“Name it—our prince’s word—the—”

" 'Tis needless, good father," interrupted Albert, " already does Master Mallet know all needful conditions."

" Then speak thy wish, good Roger,—we list but to perform it."

The miser's lips curled with bitterness, his eyes sparkled with anticipated revenge, and the blood mantled to his sallow face with rancorous excitement, as he replied—

" When the wretch lies at the gate of death, and his coward soul shrieks with fearful horror—or when in lingering imprisonment his raging madness makes him dash himself on the ground for the torment of his disappointment—when such a time shall arrive, and his harrowed soul can bear no other torment, then whisper in his ear, ' this is Roger Mallet's doing—it has been his help that has brought thee to this'—but promise me this, and I am yours."

" Most willingly do I promise it," exclaimed De Bourgh, with eagerness, " and most strictly too shall it be performed. But time presses,

good Roger, our plans demand an almost instant aid—will thy determination meet our wants?”

“Even so, Hubert, thou knowest me well, thou hast my word.”

“’Tis enough—when may we expect thy aid?”

“Rather, when dost thou require it, Hubert?”

“In seven days from this at the farthest; or our operations flag.”

“That they shall not, brave De Bourgh, even sooner shall a part be ready—but one thing more—amongst thy arrangements there is one care I must bespeak for myself: this day’s events have betrayed my retreat, and changed my late security into more than hazard. I am now too a marked man, and the greedy murderer will not forget me. I must then look to have a safe protection with thy friends, until a better power be established; and that thou must provide.”

"With delight, my good old friend," returned De Bourgh, with ready warmth, "come with us now, and at once place thyself beyond his ruthless power."

"Stay, good Hubert, there is no need for such haste as that, nor, indeed, will my arrangements permit it. I know the man well, I shall see him in submission ere I behold him in anger; then, when I have spurned his royal condescension and soothed my tortured soul by trampling on his offers, still there will be ample space to secure my retreat."

"Trust not to any chance, good Master Mallet," intreated Albert, who plainly saw in John's secret exclamation, an even more ruthless treatment of the old man, "but speed thee at once: thou knowest the heartless wretch with whom thou hast to deal, and that his cruelty is, perhaps, only equalled by his cunning; let us then persuade thee to secure thy safety whilst thou canst."

"No, no," hurriedly returned the old man,

"it cannot be,"—he looked cautiously round—
"there are other things to be provided for, the safety of which is as dear as life. No, leave me to myself—on the se'nicht day come to me again; then all shall be prepared, and Roger Mallet will trust himself and all that is dear to him to your keeping;—for the present, leave me."

"I like it not, good Roger," returned De Bourgh, still hesitating to go, "I would much rather thou would'st listen to my son's suggestions; I cannot think thee safe here now."

"*Here!*" repeated the miser, "I said not I should be here, Hubert; I shall have far and wide to traverse ere that day arrives. Let it content thee that I shall then await thee as I have promised, and that I shall be fully prepared."

"If thou wilt so have it, good Roger," replied De Bourgh, turning to leave the room, "we must e'en submit—till that day then, farewell."

“And thou, young man,” continued the miser, beckoning to Albert to remain; “what thou hast seen,” he whispered, “beware thou breathest not to mortal ears — remember thy oath.”

“I shall, good Master Mallet,” returned Albert, adding with grateful emotion, “and thy deliverance of me from certain destruction; that too I shall remember. But do not slight my caution, Master Mallet; believe me, danger surrounds thee here; let it not reach thee through any needless delay, but let my poor voice warn thee in time, and save thee from further cruelty.”

The old man gazed earnestly in his face, his aged eyes filled with tears, and in a faltering voice he inquired,

“And wherefore, young man, shouldst thou care to save me? why concern thyself for aught so wretched as poor Roger Mallet? Thou lonkest upon my aged locks, as if thou wouldst not that they should be spurned and insulted—Heaven thank thee, young Sir, for thy kind sympathy—sad and many have, in-

deed, been my years, for they have known none of the tender charities of life that make it valuable, and one irresistible passion hath made them cheerless and desolate. I have wealth, indeed, Master De Bourgh—I could roll in riches, and build my house with gold—nay, even kings court my aid, and kingdoms totter at my bidding; but all this is nothing, there is in it no happiness to its miserable possessor; fear, jealousy, and suspicion, are the sum of my existence, and in the whole wide world I knew not”—his voice suddenly fell—“that there was one heart that could have felt even pity for so despicable a being. I have known hatred, contempt, scorn,—insults and revilings have been heaped upon me, and persecution has not spared her cruel hand; but one generous emotion, even from the hundreds I have assisted, I have not known—’twas far too good, too gracious for the niggardly, the heartless miser,—disdain and hate his fitter desert. And yet I have a heart, a heart that has felt their cruelty, that can feel the stranger sympathy, that *does*, young man, feel the compassionating pity that

generates thy concern for me—and from my soul do I thank thee.”

The struggle had been too long endured, his feelings could no longer be restrained, and ashamed of his weakness, he motioned Albert to withdraw, as the bitter rush of grief burst from him.

De Bourgh was impatiently waiting Albert's rejoining him, as, his purposes thus so favourably secured, he had determined at once to withdraw from the city, before any fortuitous event betrayed his presence there; and he desired some further conference with his young friend ere they were again separated.

A few words explained to him the cause of the youth's detention, and then briefly detailing to him the principal objects that would demand his attention during his absence, and reminding him of his own intended operations, he affectionately encouraged Albert to renewed caution and perseverance, and again parted from him.

Albert felt greatly this so hastily renewed separation; agitated as his spirits still were by

the evening's events, and increased as seemed the array of dangers that beset his enterprise, by the late exhibition of the brutal cruelty of his arch enemy, it appeared to him, that this short interview but reminded him, how much, amid threatening perils, De Bourgh's protecting guidance and friendly aid were wanted, and, in place of comfort, was but the source of tantalising regret. But he had now come too far to hesitate, or even to desire to escape any hazards which the further perfecting of his designs demanded from him; nor was there indeed opportunity for any retrogressive thoughts; extreme and instant were the exertions claimed at his hands—peculiar too as important; and repressing the very sigh that struggled in his breast, he quickened his steps, if possible to regain the royal residence, ere his prolonged absence had been noticed.

He passed the gates without observation, and was even now congratulating himself on his believed good fortune, when he felt his sleeve suddenly pulled from behind. He turned round with surprise, for he was not aware

that any one was near him. Hid within one of the window recesses in the gallery along which he was hastening, stood the sayer of sayings, his attitude that of caution, his countenance marked with extreme anxiety; he put up his finger to his lips to betoken silence, and then whispering in his ear—

“To the queen, young Sir, to the queen—let not aught delay thee,” passed noiselessly from him, and the next instant disappeared through the casement.

So quick was his movement, and so abrupt the whole scene of his appearance, that Albert would almost have doubted its reality, but that the strange caution still sounded in his ears and affected him with perplexing wonder.

But he trifled not with the warning, and hastily adjusting his dress, at once sought the queen's chamber.

As however he was crossing the hall to the state gallery, young Laci accosted him with much more courtesy than was wont with him; at the same time planting himself so directly in

his way, that he could not, without offence, avoid stopping.

"Ah! De Bourgh is that you, at last?" exclaimed the youth; "I know not how long we have been waiting for you."

"I am sorry to hear it," returned Albert, with cool indifference; "for at present I am especially engaged," and he moved a step forward, as if he would have passed on.

"Nay, De Bourgh," continued Laci, by no means daunted by his evident wish to escape him; "do not be so churlish; for this once, at least, pray join our party—you know you promised that you would."

This was true enough, for Albert, fearful that his unvarying reserve might be productive of mischief through the jealousy and spite of his young colleagues, had resolved to forego some little of his own wishes, and join them occasionally in their pastimes: attempting not therefore to deny the claim, he merely begged its delay.

"And so I will, Laci, but I cannot now—

indeed I cannot ; I am obliged this moment to see the queen."

"The queen! indeed," exclaimed the youth, with much apparent surprise; "her majesty has ordered no one to disturb her this evening; so if that is all, you may e'en make yourself perfectly at ease."

"And yet I cannot, Laci," returned Albert, "without learning her grace's pleasure, either from herself or one of her ladies."

"I hope, De Bourgh," inquired Laci, with no slight hauteur, "I am not to understand that you doubt my word?"

"Why—not exactly,"—Albert spoke carelessly—"but most certainly I shall not, for the sake of your assertion, omit doing that I believe to be my duty; so let me pass."

His obstinacy seemed too much for Laci's endurance; his real feeling at once betrayed itself,

"Duty, indeed! some talk loudly about duty, when it means little besides talk; and that duty is not half so well performed, as by others who talk less."

Albert felt the necessity of shewing a proper

spirit, aware that any failing, or even suspected failing there, would bring upon him a cabal, which he could not meet; advancing therefore boldly up to the youth, and assuming an attitude of defiance, he warmly demanded,

“What mean you, sirrah? is that an intended insult?”

“What if I should say, yes?” retorted Laci, meeting his antagonist’s menace with an attitude of at least equal valour.

Now Albert had many considerations to perplex his next movement: he had by no means intended by his warlike position actually to bring on hostilities, the mere daunting of his foe by the aspect of battle being its entire object, although from Laci’s retort it would seem, that if he was not really dared to the attack, he most certainly had failed to secure his object; the question, therefore, for his decision was, whether to try his strength or beat a retreat.

Against the first proceeding, there were many and excellent objections almost needless to particularize—the place—their mutual condition—

Phædrus' caution—and some too as good more personal reasons: the second plan seemed on every account the preferable, having in its favour, its more easy accomplishment—the less hazard of its result, or interruption to his purposed interview, and nothing against it, but the mere chance of being thought to have more shew of fight than its actual doing.

After therefore a few moments of such prudent deliberation, Albert turned proudly on his heel, and in reply to the young man's demand, sarcastically observed—

“ Laci, I were indeed a dolt to let a mere testy humour from thee thwart a purpose of so much higher value; but for that, I had taught thee an useful lesson.”

“ *Thou* teach me indeed!” returned the youth, with even greater insolence; but Albert had already brushed past him, nor stayed to notice his exclamation: nor did even the questionable addition—questionable as to the intention of its reaching him—“ thou woman's boy!” arrest his hurrying step, for he was now at so great a distance from Laci, that it could scarcely

be thought that he could hear the insult ; and as it both better secured his anxious purpose, and as well answered his estimate of their relative prowess not to hear it—for his antagonist was a strong athletic youth, and far above a match for him—he e'en heard it not, as any one would have judged from appearances, nor paused he again, until he had arrived at the queen's apartments

CHAPTER XIII.

" 'Twas pretty, though a plague,
To see him every hour ! to sit and draw
His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,
In our heart's table ; heart too capable
Of every line and trick of his sweet favour."

All's well that ends well.

THE many opportunities which the royal Isabella's preference for Albert afforded him of studying her gentle character, had tended, as has already been said, to a high estimation of her virtues, and pity for the splendid misery that was so evidently her lot ; while the kind regard wherewith she honoured him, was returned with an attachment as sincere and ardent as their relative conditions permitted.

But those same opportunities had also a fur-

ther consequence ; they introduced him to her majesty's maids of honour, then more especially in waiting upon her highness, the Ladies Thérèse St. Vere, and Maud Howard, than whom, perhaps, though equally interesting, no two characters could have been more dissimilar. Thérèse was all life and spirits, Maud all soul and deepest feeling—feeling too deep for gaiety, or even the careless sallies of the other. Thérèse laughed herself into her mistress' favour ; it was the irresistible intelligence of Maud's look that struck to her heart. The cheerful humour of the one often wiled away a sigh from the royal breast ; but the deep sensibility of the other was always grateful. Thérèse, indeed, scarcely ever looked sad ; Maud scarcely ever smiled ; and when she did, the more congenial sigh followed so quickly in its steps, that it almost seemed to mock the unwonted stranger. Their very beauty—for it would have been churlish to say that both were not beautiful—invidious to make a preference between them—was as distinct as their characters. The light blue eye of the one, her flaxen hair, and pelli-

cid skin, and the dimpled cheek, as if native joy had marked it with his signet, and the nimble step that tripped lightly and merrily along—all said that she was Mirth and Gladness' daughter; while the dark piercing eye of the other, her black raven hair, and the lines of thought and feeling that marked her rich yet dark complexion, and more especially the slow pensive step that was her wonted gait, declared that deep and solitary musings, and the soul's intensest purposes, were to her as pleasure and highest gratification.

It might, perhaps, be that some kindred feeling in Isabella's mind—some sad and hopeless regret, or some corroding sorrow, had knit her soul to this child of melancholy, and bound her to her in the sweet bonds of sympathy. Nor was such an influence confined to the royal bosom: Albert, too, felt some such tender feeling; and while he almost shrunk from the wit and liveliness of the laughing Thérèse, his heart sought, with eager pleasure, the pensive breathings of Maud's quick sensibility.

There was, too, between them one topic of

mutual, though widely originated interest, which drew them still more closely together, and was to them, it might be, in place of other regard.

Near to the royal person, the melancholy, silent companion of all but her state, there was an object whose very glance was sadness, her absent, cheerless air—despondency, and her sigh—desolation. It was the princess Eleanor, the niece of the king, the sister of the young Duke of Brittany. She had not yet attained to the full maturity of womanhood, and yet to behold her, it seemed as if an age of misery had been her portion. Oh! fair and lovely was she to look upon, and her princely gait such as royal majesty might be proud to boast of—but alas! some withering grief had marred her better creation, and her soul was dark as midnight gloom.

Sudden, indeed, had been the awful bereavement. In earlier life the princess was both strong in mind, and her quick intellect had promised the highest attainments; but a blight

had come over that young existence, and withered it to this useless nothing.

Cruelty, the ingenious device of a heartless tyrant for her hoped-for destruction, had torn her from her beloved parent, and consigned her to strange and unfriendly tutelage; the blow seemed too severely blighting—suddenly did she droop—despondency seemed her existence, and too soon a dark and hopeless wretchedness her only prospect.

The tyrant had either repented him of his ruthless barbarity, or having now no apprehension of her further troubling him, had relinquished his earlier purposes; and believing that her known residence in his court—few, indeed, were aware of, or even suspected her actual condition—might tend to his advantage, and in some degree counteract her brother's open attempts, had carried her with him wherever the court moved, and had required her to be the constant companion of the queen's hours of retirement.

It wanted little to gain the gentle Isabella's concurrence: the poor Eleanor, indeed, trou-

bled her not, nor was she a tie either upon her amusements or her conversations, and as she sat by her, mute and motionless, she almost forgot that she was there, nor repressed any the most secret observations even to the king himself, by reason of her presence ; so that, lost as was the princess to herself, she was even a greater blank to all around her. Such was the damsel of Brittany—born almost to a throne—now, the pitying soul shuddered to think how desolate her desolation.

But beyond this general interest, which all who beheld her could not fail to feel for so sad a wreck of nature's perfectness, Albert seemed to have a far intenser anxiety about all that concerned her ; and endless were his inquiries into her history, and more especially as to the progress of her sad calamity.

Satisfactory, however, as was the information which Maud Howard was both competent to give, and also did time after time retail to him with scrupulous minuteness, and delightful as were such conferences, they were not altogether, at least on Albert's side, with-

out perplexing solicitude ; it was, indeed, with real regret and sorrow that he observed a consequence of their frequent communings, such as he had not dreamt of, and which for a time he eagerly sought to persuade himself was naught but a fancy as unreal as the idlest phantasy.

But soon was that first suspicion beyond doubt, and the fixed and tender glances that he so oft detected, and the brighter looks that lighted up on his appearance, and the almost rapture wherewith she hung upon his words, too soon convinced him that he was beloved, that the pensive maiden had given her soul, even with all that extreme of ardour wherewith every emotion was felt, to one sad, hopeless passion. He little, indeed, thought to have met with such a perplexity as this, but it was only one more difficulty in his difficult path, and he submitted.

To arrest the incipient feeling ere its infancy had passed into a maturer strength, and at once destroy the very germ of promise, was his instant resolution. Perhaps a studied air of

indifference and avoidance would have been his readiest course, but for this object of mutual, and so deep interest, that compelled their continued intercourse, and that it was so ungracious to his feelings ; Albert, therefore, as a kinder man, determined at once to declare the truth, and acknowledge that his heart's fond vows were devoted to another.

In pursuance of such firm intention, Albert sedulously sought a suitable opportunity of explaining himself ; and though pity for the pain he was about to give to so fair a creature, and grief that to one so much esteemed, he should be the unhappy cause of so great disappointment and dejection, depressed his own heart when he thought of it, and pleaded hardly if but for a short pause in its performance, he still held by his purpose, nor swerved even in thought from that his believed duty.

Perhaps, indeed, the object of his so earnest solicitude already guessed the miserable fate that awaited her ; for quick as were her feelings, her penetration was not less so, and in his averted eye, and the looks that answered not

her's with any reciprocal emotion, and in the calm composure of his manner, she read a truth that was the death of her every hope.

Then, indeed, did she sigh—far bitterer then became that throe of sadness that ever oppressed her, and the dark pensive stream of her thoughts fell deeper into the gloomy courses of despondency. But still it was a despondency not altogether without hope, a thousand improbable chances seemed to buoy her ardent mind above despair, and she still clung to the hope of a better feeling—though it was as the struggling effort of a drowning wretch, who catches hold of the merest straw to save himself from destruction, that she supported herself; for she felt that a far more ruthless destruction than his rushed upon her, and as long as one effort, though even madder than his, was left, the intensity of her feelings sprang to attempt it.

As might be well imagined, the great increase of sadness which resulted from such a state of feeling, could not fail materially to depress her spirits, and at the same time cause it to

be observed by so kind and pitying a mistress, as the gentle Isabella.

The queen first rallied her, but she soon found that it was too extreme an emotion for any bantering, and an anxious solicitude took place of her lighter feeling; she sought her confidence, and though her maiden modesty, and the almost hopeless passion to which she had sacrificed herself, forbade the blushing Maud to satisfy her royal friend, her secret, almost unconscious glances that she detected, soon satisfied so earnest an observer of the actual fact.

Isabella loved the pensive maiden—as much for her worth, as her congenial mind did she love her; she determined to tax her with her suspicion, and, admitted to be correct, to use her utmost influence to promote her happiness, the relative condition of the young people offering no impediment to her design: and it was on the very evening of Albert's visit and detention at Roger Mallet's, that taking advantage of their being alone, (the poor Eleanor, who sat near them in her wonted abstraction,

being no bar even to the feeling of their privacy,) she began to put her resolution into practice.

“Maud, poor soul!” she continued, in allusion to some previous observation of the damsel, “thou answerest not with thy usual energy; sad as is thy best liveliness, thy present tones sound even sadder than thy worst melancholy—art thou ailing, child?”

“No, Madam,”—the maiden attempted to smile—“wherefore should your grace so imagine? My lady knows that with her humble friend, melancholy is as a beloved sister, mirth almost an unwished for stranger.”

“Thy *friend*, Maud, does indeed so know thy disposition; wherefore shouldst thou by that ungracious humility remind me of my high estate, as if Isabella alone, of all her sex around her, is to be debarred the privilege of being loved, and her assured affection were almost doubted its sincerity?”

“Pardon me, dearest lady; were I the merest wretch that sports with kindness, and tramples under foot the highest obligations as

worthless nothings, believe me, I could not, even then, fail to feel the many and undeserved kindnesses wherewith my royal mistress has honoured me."

"Rather say the love she has given thee, Maud : with thee, at least, let me put off royalty, and know nought but native feeling and the heart's true emotions ; every where else, child, I find enough of empty state and hollow ceremony—let me not be a mark too high for love, lest it add another to the wretchedness wherewith majesty afflicts me, and I the more bitterly curse its splendid misery."

"My dearest mistress, indeed, indeed, I love you, sincerely as the true heart can know affection, and with that heart's most devoted friendship."

"I believe thee, girl, I do know that thou givest not thy heart at any time in any limit of affection, and I will not doubt thy words, for they are far too grateful to me—would that all thy warm affections, Maud, were as well returned as this thy love for me."

The maiden blushed, and some conscious

feeling kept her mute ; the queen, however, took no notice of her confusion, but with apparent indifference shortly added—

“ My young page De Bourgh seems to tire of his duty to us.” Maud was even more confused. “ I fear, Maud, that like the rest of his sex, he is spoiled by over-indulgence ; thinkest thou not that I should curtail my favour towards the youth ?”

“ He means not inattention, dear Madam,”—the maiden spoke in a disordered tone,—“ your highness has not a more loyal heart about you.”

“ Sayest thou so, girl ? thou makest, indeed, a bold assertion, though I fear with little proof ; nay, nay, Maud, I yield not my own opinion on so slender foundation ; depend upon it, his heart is not sincere towards us.”

“ As sincere, dearest lady, as your own would wish it,”—the maiden spoke with animation,—“ I can answer for De Bourgh, that the welfare of the royal Isabella is as dear as his own, and as dearly sought after.”

“ *Thou* canst answer, Maud ! Methinks thou art taking a responsibility upon thyself,

such as one so young and so artless should not do. Thou blushest, child—ha! mayhap thou hast a better authority for thine assurance than I gave thee credit for—is it e'en so, simpleton? Nay, I force no unwilling confidence."

"I have nothing, dear lady—indeed, I have nothing to confide."

"Nay, my sweet Maud, seek not to deceive me, or if thou wilt persist in so miserable an attempt, let not your looks thus deny the assertion of your lips; believe me, I would rather trust one single look from those tell-tale eyes, than ten thousand of thy strongest denials; and they say guilty—so plainly do they say it, that I cannot value thy words."

"Then your grace must decide as it pleases you."

"Nay, dear girl, look not thus offended. I ask not your confidence from any idle motive, but from an anxious wish for your welfare; believe me I know enough of wronged affections—how I have suffered, oh, how bitterly, how despairingly I have suffered from that consuming sorrow—witness my faded looks, and

the sad melancholy that has taken place of my maiden sprightliness. I would spare thee, poor child, from so ruthless an anguish—I would save thy young heart from a misery to which death is as elysium. If, therefore, thou wantest a friendly breast in the which to pour thy complaints—for too surely in thine altered looks do I discern that thy fond hopes have but small promise to comfort thee—or my best influence can in any way remove the difficulties in thy path, confide in me—even with thy whole heart, trust to me: if otherwise, and I can neither comfort nor assist thee, let the subject be for ever a forbidden one.”

“Dearest lady,” passionately exclaimed Maud, “your goodness overpowers me. I know not how to answer you;” and as she spoke, ’twas in vain that she sought to conceal her tears.

The queen kissed her, tenderly comforting her drooping spirits with kindest encouragement:—

“Cheer up, my love, cheer up, thou speakest to one who can both feel for thee, and will

well and patiently listen to thy tale ; for alas ! Maud, thy friend once loved, even as fond, adoring maidens love, and—" she forced back a tear,—“ but it matters not now, that—and with it, every happiness, is past. Speak on, then, my child, nor let a fear perplex thee—thou lovest this youth ?”

“ To my sorrow, dear Madam,” —the maiden’s voice was scarcely audible—“ I do.”

“ Wherefore to thy sorrow, child ? De Bourgh is well and nobly born, and despite my anger, is worthy thy choice—he cannot be unkind to thee, Maud ?”

“ Oh ! no, no,” hurriedly answered the maiden, “ he is too kind, as too noble—for my peace.”

“ Then why this dejection, girl ? has any wayward humour interrupted your good understanding ?”

“ There never was any understanding, Madam.”

“ What ? dost thou think to tell me that the youth knows not thy fond preference ? Nay, even insensibility, Maud, could not be blind to thy sweet charms, and De Bourgh’s heart is

cast in none so stubborn a mould—young as he is in love's mysteries, he must know it, child—and can it be possible that he does not return it? Say, dearest girl, wherefore thy depression, for my penetration fails to discover its cause?"

"Alas, dear lady, I have madly cherished my fatal passion even against hope. Its commencement was without foundation—its progress without encouragement—and its maturity has ripened even in the midst of cheerless clouds and winter's keenest snows."

"I cannot believe it, dear Maud; thy anxious wishes have deceived thee."

The maiden shook her head; "In his cold, unmoved demeanour, in his calm, averted eye, and the studied indifference wherewith he ever greets me, even in the midst of kindest attentions, I read the certain truth, that no warmer feeling than friendship can ever have existence."

"And is it for this, poor child," quickly demanded the queen, with a compassionating smile, "that thou yieldest thyself to such unchanging sorrow—hast thou no other foundation for thy

tears than these thy simple fancies? nay, then indeed cheer up, and trust to thy friend even as thou lovest me, to secure thee a better comfort."

"Nay, dearest lady, indeed it cannot be—you must not betray your poor friend. De Bourgh would hate—detest me."

"Calm thy fears, poor child, nor trouble thyself for aught that my zeal shall dictate. Believe me, Maud, discretion shall go along with me, and the tenderest regard for maiden feeling, which one, who so esteems that best ornament of her sex, can never overlook, shall alone direct me. But do thou cheer up—let smiles and sunshine drive away these murky clouds, and the serene sky of tranquillity dawn upon the morning of joy that awaits thee."

"Joy, dearest Madam, await me? alas, no—in my gloomy horoscope, a feeling so pleasureable as that had no existence; but still I will not be obstinate in my sadness, nor return so kind solicitude with ungracious inattention; at least my generous mistress shall not have to call me ungrateful."

“And so, my sweet Maud, amply repay her extremest solicitude.”

At this moment the door of the apartment was rudely opened, and the king broke suddenly on their conference; anger and rage frowned upon his countenance, and changed its wonted favour into almost shuddering repulsiveness—shuddering, indeed, to those who lived within its influence—to the gentle Isabella, even to agony. She essayed to speak, and by her words of peace to soothe the troubled war of passion that rioted within him; but the words died upon her lips.

John paced several times across the apartment in uneasy silence, ere in a harsh, impatient voice, he demanded of the queen:—

“Pray, Madam, where is thy minion, De Bourgh, this evening?”

“Minion!” interjected the indignant Maud.

“My lord,” returned the queen, with much meekness, “indeed, I know not.”

“Ah!” quickly exclaimed her consort, “is he again rambling? By God’s teeth, it looks

not well—since when has the youth absented himself?”

“’Tis certainly some hours, my lord; but we have needed not his services—mayhap he may only be at his pastimes with the rest of his young companions.”

“Indeed, most royal lady!”—John spoke with a bitterness that the more deeply alarmed the queen—“but, despite so bland an apologist, I doubt the fact. Let him, however, be sent for, and if not in the way, mark the moment of his return, and let me be advised on’t; I have my reasons.”

“Your majesty shall be obeyed,” replied Isabella, in an agitated voice; “I am sorry, my lord, that my page should have in any way incurred your anger; but certainly in this his absence, the fault is mine, as I have in no way curtailed his liberty.”

“Isabella,” interrupted the king, “I care not for his liberty nor aught else concerning him, save to know when he appears; if, however, it shall be within many hours, I am wrongly informed.”

“What suspects my lord?” anxiously demanded the queen.

“It matters not, lady, now. I’ll probe my suspicion first, and if, as I believe, he comes not yet, thou shalt then learn it, and my severity punish it.” And ere he had finished speaking, John quitted the apartment, leaving the queen and her attendant in no small surprise and agitation.

Their mutual inquiries as to some explanation of the king’s sudden anger, were as fruitless as were their surmises unsatisfactory; and although Isabella’s anxiety was less exciting than that of her young friend, yet her regard for her preferred page, as well as her fear lest any unhappy event to him might add to the dejection of her favourite, Maud, kept her in a state of distressing solicitude. And it was with an equal delight and satisfaction that they heard Albert’s footsteps, as not many minutes after the king’s departure, he prayed admittance into the royal chamber.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves ; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not."

SHAKESPEARE.

ISABELLA met not her young page's advances with her wonted graciousness, nor, indeed, did he from his manner seem to expect that she should smile upon him. He was, in reality, prepared for some displeasure, though wherefore he had yet to learn ; and his consciousness of the thousand snares around him, and the hourly risk of detection to which he was liable, gave to his approach under the doubt of the nature of his offence, an air of guilt, which in spite of himself he could not counteract. His quick penetration, however,

soon discovered, that, so far from being a forbidden intruder, his presence, if not welcome, was at least not unpleasant; and at once deciding therefrom upon Laci's suspicious interruption, he took courage, and assuming the carriage of offended pride, exclaimed with much warmth, without giving opportunity for the queen to anticipate his purpose—

“I trust my royal mistress will pardon this intrusion on her so express commands, but—”

“Intrusion—commands!” interrupted the queen, “what means the youth? we know of no such orders, nor have any such issued from us.”

“The varlet!” returned Albert, with indignation. “’Tis, indeed, well that I doubted his lying words, or I should have added further to my fault—Your grace, circumstances that I could not control, have delayed my return to my duty; I was hurrying to throw myself on your majesty’s kindness, when the page De Laci confronted me, and assuring me of your highness’ commands on no account to be intruded upon, sought to divert my intention; and I had indeed yielded to his subtlety,

but that deeply feeling my offence already committed, I was determined to be assured beyond doubt of the truth of his assertion, lest, by any accident, I should add to your grace's evident displeasure."

"Thou hast acted wisely, however," returned the queen, in a more gracious manner, "and this evident design upon thee releases half our displeasure; but still we will be candid with thee, De Bourgh,—we like not these too frequent rambles of thine, which so often have encroached upon thy duty."

"Most gracious lady, pardon thy servant's fault,—your grace shall not again have cause for anger."

"As for ourself, De Bourgh, we willingly accept thy apology; but thou hast a far more difficult task before thee than that: thy royal master is grievously offended against thee, nay, but for this thy opportune appearance, had condemned thee more severely than I believe thou deservest."

"And in what manner," inquired Albert, with great agitation, "have I been so unfor-

tunate as to fall under his grace's displeasure?"

"That, De Bourgh, I cannot even surmise; perhaps, indeed, your own conscience can better tell you."

Albert looked little easy under this direct application to a monitor that reminded him of more than sufficient cause for the king's displeasure; but he quickly replied, desirous to withdraw the scrutiny of his fair auditors—

"Indeed, my royal lady, I know not the cause, even my conscience detects it not, however anxiously I inquire."

"Nor do I believe that thou art *intentionally* guilty,"—the queen smiled graciously as she spoke—"but the sooner his grace's anger is removed the better for us all, and it shall be my task to attempt it. I cannot, De Bourgh, better prove my favour to thee."

"Your kindness, my gracious mistress," replied Albert, with heartfelt sincerity, "beggars my poor thanks, though there wanted not this mediation to tie my deepest gratitude to you for ever."

"Well, De Bourgh, we shall see; remember, however, 'tis deeds that must prove thy sincerity, words will no longer content us."

And without waiting for a reply the queen quitted the apartment.

Left alone with the pensive maiden, Albert could not avoid feeling embarrassed at the opportunity thus suddenly presented to him for the fulfilment of his purposed explanation, nor did her evident confusion at all tend to his better composure; with each, however, that feeling was quickly dissipated by the anxious inquiry as to the nature of the king's displeasure.

"Knows not my gentle Maud," inquired Albert, after a few moment's hesitation, "the cause of my offence, or is she, as her royal mistress, unable even to surmise it?"

"Even so, good Albert," returned the maiden, averting her blushing face, as she quickly added, "but oh! if any conscious offence striketh thee, of such a magnitude as to warrant the extreme vengeance wherewith his grace threatens thee—oh! do not, do not wait

for its destruction, but fly from it whilst thou canst."

"Thank thee, dearest Maud," fervently replied the youth, "for thy earnest solicitude; but calm thy apprehensions: 'tis but the secret malice of some hidden foe, that has given me the king's displeasure, and I can well trust our gentle mistress."

"As far as her influence extends thou mayest well trust her, for earnest is her solicitude for thy welfare; but I liked not the king's brow; there was a bitterness in his wrath, that makes me doubt even the lovely Isabella's ascendancy."

"Never fear, my sweet girl, here I must abide the sequel, be that what it may; though I doubt not that the storm, even of that ruthless breast, will pass away. See how content I am even under its moody threatenings; would, Maud, that I could as well content myself in returning thy unmerited kindness."

"Then be content, Albert,"—the maiden seemed alarmed—"indeed I ask no return, but—"

"Stay, dear Maud,"—Albert gently took her

hand as hespoke—"this trembling hand tells me, perhaps, more than thou wouldst have said : it tells me, Maud, that thy ardent soul *does* ask more than that I give thee. Alas, dearest girl, that we ever met,—that I should be to thee the unwitting source of unhappiness."

Albert paused for agitation, while the trembling maiden, fixing her downcast eyes on the ground, waited in almost breathless silence, as if afraid, yet yearning to hear her further fate.

"That, Maud, thy friendship has been dear to me, that my heart acknowledges thy kindness with sincere and fervent attachment, I willingly allow ; but it is not, Maud, *such* an attachment as I feel thou wouldest it should have been ; and that warm affection, which I pride myself in cherishing for you, permits me not to conceal the real truth, much as it grieves me for the pain it will give you. Dear Maud, I do not say forget so unworthy an object, for your friendship is dear as it is honourable to me ; but oh ! think not of any fonder emotion—for that can never be—there is

a bar between us that makes its very thought an impossibility."

Albert again paused, but the maiden still neither moved nor attempted to reply; she stood, indeed, as the picture of distress and wretchedness, not even a sigh burst from her—for her feelings were too intense for any relief, and her trembling hand, as it still lay in his, was the only evidence how miserably his words had affected her.

"Pardon me, dear Maud," he continued, "the sadness I inflict, and ascribe it to its true cause, my esteem for you; bitter, indeed, to my very soul is it, that I should thus be a source of sorrow to one so beloved—even bitterer, that I may not even name that impassable barrier which severs us, for ever, from any nearer tie than that of friendship."

Albert again looked on the lovely countenance, that seemed almost to mock his indifference to its beauty; but oh! how sad and wan did it then appear—and those dark, melancholy eyes, that had gazed so oft and too fondly with kindness and affection, how were

they now fixed and lost in cold despair ! His heart bled for her—but still, he had no comfort—not even dared he to hold out one promise of hope. He started from that bitter reverie—a change had passed suddenly over the maiden, her eyes quivered with convulsive anguish, her lips trembled, and her whole frame seemed to shudder with some inward agony—the next instant, without a groan or sigh, she fell into his arms insensible to all, even to her hopeless misery. Albert placed her gently on a couch, and flew for some restoratives ; a few moments only seemed to have passed when he returned, but the maiden was gone, and the almost instant clapping to of a door as he re-entered the apartment, betokened the way by which she had disappeared.

He stood perplexed and astonished at her so sudden recovery, and almost questioned if it were not a dream on which he thought—but oh, no ! that speechless anguish, those glazed eyes of despair—the desolation of a broken heart that breathed forth, as she sunk into

insensibility—oh, no! that was no dream. The pitying tear filled his eye, for well did he know the irresistible influence of woman's love—well could he judge how the fatal canker of disappointment would feed on her damask cheeks, and the aching heart of secret sorrow pine her sweet loveliness even to the grave. Oh! how did he commiserate, how did he mourn her cheerless fate—how did he grieve that he should be a curse to so much—so loved excellence. But he could no more; beyond pity and regret, there was not in his thoughts a single comfort, not one faintest hope—a brighter day could never dawn upon her midnight darkness.

Albert's reflections were abruptly and strangely interrupted—a small taper hand was placed softly on his arm, and a low unknown voice pronounced his name. He started quickly round, for he had not heard any step approach him, nor was he aware that any one was near. But his surprise passed instantly into mute astonishment, when he beheld the Princess Eleanor at his side—it was indeed to

his feelings as if a spectre had accosted him : he gazed earnestly in her face, as in the attitude of an intense listener, she seemed to mark some passing sound, inaudible to him ; and the earnest anxiety, which, in place of her wonted abstraction, was there depicted, but added to his astonishment.

“Albert de Bourgh,” she again whispered in hurried accents, after a few moments’ scrutiny, “thy father’s life is in danger—he is to me even dearer than to thyself—dearer than my own preservation ; and to save him, I throw off the mask of many years, and commit my safety to thy keeping ;”—she suddenly paused, as if again detecting some approaching sound.

Albert’s fixed eye had never for one instant withdrawn its gaze from the interesting object before him. Well indeed might he gaze ! The princess’ form was matchless in commanding majesty, and her finely marked features, now robed in the soul’s high feeling, gave to her a radiance of almost splendid excellence. Her height was tall and commanding ;

and; as with one hand on his wrist, and the other raised up in cautious silence, she leaned forward and gazed earnestly towards the door by which the queen had departed, as if from thence she feared surprise, so unmovable was her attitude, that she seemed rather as a finely-sculptured statue of the goddess Muta, than a young and mortal maiden. Albert, however, seemed perplexed with other feelings beside those of surprise and admiration; various agitating emotions marked his features, and among them an impatience to learn her further words, seemed by no means the least. He would have spoken, but there was a commanding injunction in her attitude, that restrained his purpose, nor did he dare to interrupt a silence, that to her seemed so important.

“Remember, De Bourgh,” she at length continued, “this is no common confidence; the comfort, nay, the very life of Eleanor of Brittany, depends upon thy keeping the secret. I ask no pledge of thee for thy truth, thy father’s safety, assured through my means, is my safe-guard, and on it I can securely rely.”

“Am I indeed awake?” exclaimed Albert, unable to restrain his confused feelings; “does not some unreal mockery cheat my pleased senses?”

“No! De Bourgh, it is no vision that thou seest—for many years of sad and cheerless melancholy, have I endured this horrible cheat, nor has one word, even of complaint, been forced from my bursting heart: but death and misery stood over me, and I could only escape by covering myself up with this dark shroud of mental desolation;—but a truce to self.—Thy father is suspected by the tyrant, and even now do I fear those ruthless purposes against him, that crave for blood—thou must instantly seek him, and bid him absent himself from the court for a time, unless he can gain the noble Ramsay to a seeming of his duty—dost thou understand? Why dost thou thus gaze upon me, and lose thyself in thine own thoughts, when thy parent’s safety should stir thee up to warmest zeal and instant action?”

“I heard thee, lady,” returned the youth, still fixing his eyes upon the princess; “and

well marked thy words—but surprise and joy have confused me—and so much would I say, that—”

“Thou perplexest me greatly, De Bourgh,” interrupted the princess; “thy emotions seem pleasure and delight, though anxiety should be thy only feeling—it cannot be that so unhappy a wretch as Eleanor, that even the knowledge—so grateful to thy loyalty, that I sleep not indeed in the mental death it is believed, can cause thee such satisfaction, when thy father’s welfare demands all thy thoughts—”

Albert looked cautiously round while she was speaking, and then gazing earnestly at her with a look full of anxious meaning, and at the same time assuming a gentler tone than his wonted speech, he pronounced her name—
“Eleanor!”

The princess started—some strange confusion appeared to perplex her; she eagerly scanned the features of the speaker, with an agitation that gave to her appearance almost an air of wildness; and she seemed to grasp with increasing avidity each successive syllable, as he proceeded—

“Hast thou altogether forgotten me? cannot thy young remembrance take thee back to earlier—happier days—when our hours were all joy, and our thoughts all peace?”—He pushed his curling locks from his forehead—“Knowest thou not this scar, dearest Eleanor?”

A cry of joyful ecstasy burst from the princess, and the same instant they were locked in each other's arms. Oh! how blissful was that long embrace—to the captive Eleanor how transporting! as the home of rest to the fainting wanderer, as the blessed morning dawns on the shipwrecked mariner, or the pure air and the glorious light burst with restored liberty on the dungeon's tenant—oh! so was that fond clasping—dear, too, were their words—and their secret whisperings dear—and the oft repeated kiss—and the mutual scrutiny of each other's looks—and the unsatisfied inquiries as to past events—and animating and soothing, even as comfort and sympathy, was their long, protracted conference.

“Dearest Eleanor!” exclaimed Albert, upon

the princess pausing in the sad narrative of her sufferings, "I but wonder that thy reason failed thee not indeed, amid such ruthless cruelty."

"And so it had," she continued, meekly raising her eyes, "but that I was spared for happier purposes; and the small star of hope, faint as was its light, and remote as was its sphere in the farthest heaven, still shone upon me, and supported me with the yet possibility of happiness: for in spite of the cautious surveillance in which I was kept, and the removal of every even suspected friend, I still read, as well in the secret fears of the cowardly usurper, which my mind's believed aberration checked not his avowing, as in the confident carriage of my known friends, that all was not lost—that a remnant was still left—that a spark still existed for our house's retribution, and that right and justice might still triumph. Even in the faithful De Bourgh, almost banished from me as he was, could I read his own confidence, and a meant hidden assurance for myself—though I knew not how

far the secret intelligence of my cautious look had reached him, or even if he understood that his anxious solicitude was not thrown away upon one, who could not estimate his truth."

"Oh, Eleanor! what are we not indebted to that kind man, for his zeal and faithfulness to our cause? it shall be my instant care to warn him of his danger; and I shall season the bitter knowledge of his peril, with the sweeter assurance, that she, for whom it is so mainly incurred, both feels and thanks him for his zeal. Your deliverance, indeed, dear Eleanor, from the tyrant's cruel power was one of the chief objects of my coming, though your believed condition almost seemed to disappoint our plans. Now, however, cheer up, and look confidently to certain and fastly returning happiness."

"Already," replied the princess, with extreme animation, "does hope warm my heart above the chilling touch of despair; and I return to my degrading artifice with far less revolting abhorrence—but, oh! how dear are your words to me—how transporting this re-

newed privilege of talking with you—animating, as is the horrible separation of myself from almost all human fellowship and feeling, monstrous. Now, indeed, well can I bear its torturing rule; nay, even turn its curdling tyranny into friendly aid, and through it gain the secret counsels of our foes to destroy them. Trust, oh! well trust to my keenest industry, that whatever anxious and extreme vigilance can gain to assist our designs shall be secured. Let us, however, be circumspect; one error, where all is destruction around us, is fatal.”

“You may well imagine, dearest Eleanor, that at least *I* have well considered the perils that beset us, and my immunity from detection, thus far, evidences that I have in no respect overlooked all cautious proceedings.”

“So you think, and so, perhaps, you *may* have indeed escaped; but beware, spies are upon your path, and that Laci, whose open treachery now so much disturbs you, is only one of many that watch your most stealthy actions; the whole court, indeed, is but one system of suspicious espionage. Trust, therefore, not

even your indifferent thoughts to any, lest they cheat you, unawares ; of more important ones—and mark, Phœdrus alone is true.”

“ My sweet counsellor, how could I neglect advice from so beloved lips. Did not my life, and ties dearer than life, rest upon my strictest wariness, thy earnest counsels, dear Eleanor, would compel me to be prudent.”

“ Don’t smile at my earnestness, dearest, but rather steer your difficult course by its direction—even now, will you require all possible circumspection. De Bourgh must be at once acquainted with the usurper’s suspicions, or confident of his highest favour, he may come to speedy and fatal harm. He has been seen in the city, though believed to be far distant, and he must deny the fact, and prove that belief, or come not near the court ; and more especially, being suspected of having trifled with the tyrant’s secret embassy to my Lord Ramsay, rather adding to, than propitiating his grace’s indignant wrath, he must, if any possible persuasion can effect it, induce the duke to appear at court in more humble guise

than his late unyielding haughtiness—Think you, you can reach De Bourgh, without your absence being detected ?”

“Fear not, Eleanor, I am not without secret friends as well as secret foes, and I doubt not that I can well, through them, secure my object without any risk.”

“’Tis happy, for if I mistake not, there is no common ill-will arisen against him. But lose no time; I shall devise some means of speaking with you on your return—though, however anxious you may be, attempt not an interview, but wait patiently until I see the fit opportunity, you know not—hist.” She suddenly paused, and pointed to the door of the apartment. Albert turned quickly round, but neither could he see any thing, nor could his anxious ears detect any approaching sound to occasion her alarm; the next instant he looked back to where she had stood, but she was no longer there. Suddenly, as noiselessly, had she passed from the spot, and at the further end of the room, sat still and motionless, in that

same deep and changeless melancholy that had seemed her whole existence.

Inexplicable as appeared her conduct, Eleanor's acute hearing, rendered peculiarly so by long and almost exclusive use, had already detected advancing footsteps, long ere even Albert's quick ears could catch the sound ; and scarcely had she assumed her wonted appearance, than the door opened, and Queen Isabella entered the apartment.

She seemed for a moment to feel surprised to find Albert alone with the princess ; but that feeling, if really existing, was soon lost in a stronger emotion—interest for her page's welfare.

“ I fear, De Bourgh,” she exclaimed, almost as she passed into the room, “ that my interference will benefit thee but little. His grace, I am sorry to say, has a heavier charge than either I was prepared for, or could even learn. I am, indeed, compelled to believe, that thou dealest not fairly with me, and that thy steps are not quite so straight-forward as thy tongue declares. Be that, however, as it may, the

king requires your instant presence, and I trust you will be able fully to excuse yourself to his highness."

"I am much beholden to my gracious mistress for her kind condescension"—Albert spoke not by any means in his usual vivacity; his spirits, indeed, were in no condition for any fresh trial, and he seemed to shrink from the ordeal demanded from him; particularly as he could not gain even a remotest hint of the cause of the king's sudden anger. If, indeed, it referred to De Bourgh's secret visit to the miser's, it would no doubt follow that his own presence there had also been detected, and in such a case, a severer fate awaited him than his worst fears had suggested; but there was no escape, his best security boldly to face the trial—though, after the evening's events, this was no small difficulty. Plainly perceiving this, he added in a firmer tone—"So valuable a mediation cannot be without benefit, and I the more boldly obey the royal commands."

The queen perceived his hesitation, and desirous to cheer his spirits, replied with much benignity.

"Be not too much cast down, De Bourgh, we will ensure thee a better favour than thou expectest, perhaps deservest; whatever the fault, your mistress's influence is not altogether without benefit; it has already paved the way to a gracious hearing, and shall not fail thee in any need, so long as thou art true and honest."

"And that," returned Albert, as with a bow of deep acknowledgment he quitted her presence, "shall be as long as life remains. What heart, indeed, could feel any other emotion, for so kind and gracious a mistress, than the loyalest attachment—how could one so loaded with obligation, fail to evince his gratitude by the most devoted fidelity?"

"I fear the youth talks somewhat too glibly," said Isabella to herself, as she sought her favourite, Maud, to learn the cause of her sudden absence; "these over-ready tongues too generally wag without discretion, and, like a loosely hung bell, clamour with the merest impetus, more than is either useful or convenient."

CHAPTER XV.

"Mark thou my words, thou churl, for this time,
Though full of our displeasure, yet we free thee
From the dead blow of it."

Winter's Tale.

It was with no light step that Albert sought the royal presence: had he known the particular accusation to be brought against him, even then he might well have feared, lest, after his late excitement, his self-possession should fail him; but in his present ignorance, his trembling hesitation almost threatened at once to betray his guilt, and he felt that should any unexpected imputation be made, his mere agitation would be even more fatal than his being unprepared to answer to the charge.

Nor was his confusion abated on entering

the royal closet. It was here that the king passed his more private hours, and here, that, too often, his most reckless purposes were devised and put into operation. So little, indeed, did John care to conceal the horrible means by which his ends were gained, that this chamber, among the retainers of the royal household, went generally by the name of "the bloody council."

When, therefore, in addition to his own faltering resolution, and the peculiar horror that he felt to undergo such an ordeal in such a place, he found in close conference with the tyrant, and the only companion of these, his secret hours, Nym Jamy, the most brutal of these ferocious murderers, to whom John committed his safety as well as the execution of his deadly plans, Albert's sensations were almost too horrible to be sustained.

Very luckily, however, the king and this minister of his jealousy and hate, were in such deep consultation on his entrance, that for some moments he was spared the necessity of speak-

ing, and thereby his worst consternation passed unobserved.

Nym Jamy was, indeed, an object, independently of his known office and origin, to affright a more fearless courage than Albert at any time boasted, much less in his present weakness; for there was in his very conformation a hideous firmness, an unnatural cruelty that shuddered the soul to look upon; he was, in truth,

“A fellow by the hand of nature marked,
Quoted and signed to do a deed of shame.”

His low broad forehead and flat head were rendered more peculiarly disgusting, by the absence of almost all hair, while the thick curling bristles that covered his chin and neck to extremest profusion, but added to the repulsiveness of his aspect, and his crooked figure and sidling gait seemed still further to declare his soul's savage deformity. But it was his eyes that gave the finish to the wretch's hideosity; placed almost in his temples, and yet, though unusually diminutive, obtruding so far out as to command a complete vision behind

him, his grey pearly eyes gave him a look so unlike any thing human, that the beholder almost sickened at the sight of them, and the fell malignancy of their expression curdled his very blood. He possessed, too, the faculty of moving them without respect to sympathies, so that he could look two ways at once ; to such a degree, indeed, had he this ability, that on Albert's entrance, although standing with his back directly against him, the youth could plainly discern his eyes fixed upon him from the opposite sides of his head.

Nor, horrible as was such a construction, did his origin improve his character ; he was an Asiatic by birth, a subject of the celebrated prince of the assassins, a nation of fanatics in those days, practising murder, not only as a duty, but if only sanctioned by their prince's mandate, as the purchase of the joys of Paradise, and against whom there seemed no defence ; scarcely any precaution, indeed, could prevent the fulfilment of the determined purpose of these subtle miscreants ; and so famous had they become, that their name has ever

since been the designation for the secret taking away of human life. It was never known how this Nym Jamy had been seduced from his native allegiance, to serve the English aspirant to his prince's infamous celebrity ; people scrupled not indeed to declare, that he had been in his pay for many years, and had hung upon king Richard's steps in the Holy Land, if not actually accessory to his death. Certain, however, it was, that some secret interest bound the wretch to John ; not unlikely the command of his prince, purchased at some high price—a purchase by no means uncommon, and a command which would secure the man's most implicit devotion to his will : and on the other hand, John not only seemed to place the greatest confidence in Nym Jamy, as if scarcely indeed feeling safe, except this his execrable defence was nigh ; but so great a value did he attach to his services, that, save for some especial murder, he barely permitted his shortest absence. When therefore he was absent, or when closeted in close conference with his congenial patron, it was always known that some

more than common desolation was in progress.

Already had Albert been sufficiently long domesticated in the royal service, to understand all these signs of his master's proceedings; and so knowing them, his present apprehensions for De Bourgh's safety, as well as for his own, could not but be materially increased, by finding himself alone with such a hellish pair.

They still whispered together, and as he looked from the hired ruffian to the royal one, and remembered his recent brutal cruelty to the miser, he scarcely seemed to know from whose pitiless inhumanity he had the most to apprehend. But that happy feature in Albert's mind, that exciting resolution which braced him to meet almost any trial, however he might afterwards yield to its effects, still supported him, in spite of the harassing occurrences of that eventful day; and he had already, in some degree, regained his composure, and with it some better fortitude to meet the dreaded storm that now was ready to burst on him, when the tyrant suddenly raising

his head, demanded from him, in no gracious accents, and with most perplexing abruptness—

“Young Sir, where wert thou this eve, at sunset?”

“And, please your grace,” returned Albert, in as firm and ready a tone as his agitation permitted, “I was but amusing myself.”

“But it does not please my grace, sirrah,” rejoined the king, in an even harsher voice; “a direct answer, young man, or thou payest for it.”

“My Lord, I was only at St. Dunstan’s gate, cheapening a palfrey for merest amusement.”

“Was thy father then with thee, stripling?”

“My father!” Albert assumed excessive surprise. “My Lord, I have not seen my father for many days—”

“Thou liest, sirrah,” the king fiercely interrupted him; “most impudently dost thou lie—have a care what thou sayest; another falsehood, and by our Holy Church, I’ll teach thee better manners.”

“Indeed, dread Sire, I do not lie,” repeated

Albert, aware that hesitation, or any change in his assertion, would be but destruction ; “ most solemnly could I swear that I have not seen my father, neither during this day, nor for many days past.”

“ Thou couldest swear, indeed ?” replied John, with a taunting laugh. “ Gramercy ! then, by St. Peter and his most pious successors, we will not baulk thee—here Nym, be thou the lad’s confessor, and e’en swear him in thine own fashion.”

“ By my God, or thine, oh ! King ?” demanded the wretch, as he advanced toward the youth.

“ E’en as thou likest best, good Nym—for myself, I have no doubt both are equally effective ;” his lip curled up contemptuously as he spoke ; “ perhaps, however, as the youth may not feel the same respect to thy worthies, as thy master does, thou mightest as well choose mine.”

Albert’s very soul sickened with horror as the monster drew nigh to him ; scarcely could he restrain a shriek when his withering hand was upon his.

"Swear, youth!" he exclaimed in a low, croaking voice, "by all the mummary which the monks teach thee, and wherein thou trustest, that thou hast not this day beheld thy father;" he pulled out a short, pointed dagger, evidently stained with recent blood, "here is thy attestor, swear!"

Albert's accents were scarcely audible for terror, as he promptly declared, "By my desire of mercy, or ever that I hope for eternal happiness at the hand of that Omnipotent God, who now beholds us, I speak the truth—I have not seen my father for many days."

"And darest thou add," demanded the king, after a moment's pause, as of disappointment, "that thou knowest not he has been this day in Winchester?"

"My lord," more boldly returned Albert, "not only will I swear that I know not of such a circumstance, but I will positively affirm that he *could* not have been there."

"Kiss the book," added Nym Jamy, with mock solemnity, at the same time drawing the dagger across Albert's lips.

"By my soul, but thou dost it well, stripling!" exclaimed the king, "though we are still no better content—what thinkest, our excellent Nym, our ghostly minister?" John laughed at his designation; "will oaths put down facts?"

"Oaths, oh, king!" exclaimed the ruffian, "cunning nothings! stuff!—facts, indeed, they are seen—but these empty words—Shall I confess the stripling in a better fashion?"—and in an instant, without waiting even for the possibility of John's reply, his hand darted suddenly to Albert's head, and forcibly grasping his thick curly locks, he held his greedy dagger at his throat, as he demanded; "the truth, boy, or confess thee quickly."

The sudden and ferocious act was, of itself, sufficient to have struck the trembling Albert to the ground; his senses, indeed, did for a moment reel, and he would have fallen, but for the unyielding support of the fellow's grasp; while the agony that resulted from so violent, almost tearing-up of his hair, roused him to

himself, at the same time that it caused the tears to blind him with its anguish.

“Thou art somewhat over zealous to-night, my good Nym,” jocularly observed the royal ruffian, “and thy shriving some little too pungent; go to, quit thee the lad, and let’s e’en hear his further speech—mayhap, Nym, he may be able now to speak more to the point.”

“E’en as your majesty pleases,” surlily returned the disappointed miscreant, as he loosed his grasp.

“And now, young Sir,” continued the unfeeling tyrant, “we would again learn the truth. Tell us not that thou knewest not of thy father’s stealthy visit, thou must have known it—beware thee—we’ll have no trifling.”

While the king spoke, his savage co-operator, as if to certify the royal intentions, passed his finger along his dagger’s edge, and minutely examined its point with a fiendish grin.

“Torture me, my lord, as you please!” exclaimed the suffering youth, in a burst of despair and indignation; “nay, kill me, if my

hutchery will content you ; but if I am to state the truth, I must still repeat my words— if lies, indeed, will better please the royal ears, I will then say any thing declare whatever your grace may dictate ; I cannot do more ; my lord — If, indeed, I am guilty of any crime, let me at once abide the consequences, though let me be proved guilty before I am condemned ; but if innocent, why torture me with this inhuman cruelty”—and he wiped off the drops of perspiration that hung thickly on his forehead.

The tyrant seemed astounded by the vehement earnestness of Albert's address ; he remained for some time fixed in silent reverie, then quickly glancing at the still trembling youth, and from him to the scowling ruffian at his side, he hastily rose, and paced to and fro the apartment with no easy steps : suddenly he paused, and closely confronting Albert, demanded,

“ Art thou not lying, stripling ? ” — then, without waiting for his denial, as if his mind was already satisfied on the point, he turned abruptly

to Jamy, "Whence, Nym, hadst thou thy suspicion?"

"The page, De Laci, swore to the fact," was the fellow's reply.

"My lord," indignantly exclaimed Albert, "De Laci is a liar, and a worthless scoundrel! Your grace, I can prove, through my honoured mistress, that he is altogether unworthy of belief."

"Saw he them together, did he say?" demanded the tyrant, as if he heard not the youth's words.

"Not exactly so, oh! king—he was sure it was De Bourgh whom he saw, and he fancied the boy had been with him."

"Pish!" retorted the king, "why that means nothing—*fancied*, indeed! the shallow fool," and he again hurriedly paced across the floor. After another lengthy reverie, he again stopped suddenly—"Young man, thy father is false to us, and repays our long attachment with worse than neglect, nay, we may almost say with treachery. We sent him on a mission, dear to our hearts, and miserably has he dis-

appointed us. He has, indeed, but added to our difficulties, and now avoids our presence. Now, hear me, youth ; although suspicion still rests on thyself, we will forgive thee on one condition : seek out thy father as soon as thou canst—we doubt not thy ability to find him, and tell De Bourgh that we invite him to return to his duty ; we will listen with candour and kindness to his excuses, nor judge even his faults severely. Tell him too, that if he refuses our favour and still absents himself from us, our veriest wrath awaits, and shall overtake him—Understandest thou, stripling ? thou needest none more explicit message—thy father's conscience will readily solve the rest—and harkye, thou mayest add too, that we know some little of his traffic with Fitz-Alan ; but even that will we forgive if he but return to us. This is our condition for thine own forgiveness ; perform it well, and we acquit thee—be thy father's conduct what it may, thou art esteemed by us, nor shalt thou go unrewarded."

Albert's penetration had at once caught the sudden change in the tyrant's purposes, and

his spirits as soon felt its benefit, for he the same moment saw, that his danger as well as his horrible examination was at an end ; he shook off his trembling apprehension, and ere the king paused for a reply, was prepared to answer in a confident tone—

“ My lord, account of me even as I accomplish my task ; if I fail, judge me, condemn me as thou pleasest ; only, my liege, suspend your decision till I return, nor suffer so base a wretch, as the lying Laci, to turn from me the royal favour.”

“ Cease, young man,” returned the king with hasty warmth. “ Laci may be mistaken—he is, indeed, a fool for palming upon us his fancies for understood facts ; ’tis, however, only his excess of zeal for our person, and therefore, mind—no squabbles between you.”

“ Would it please your highness,” persisted Albert, as if with offended innocence, “ to refer his truth in this matter to the royal Isabella ? if your majesty finds not his conduct baser than baseness, I have done.”

“ Leave that to us,”—the king seemed anxious

to waive the subject—"do thou speed thee on thine errand, and that well achieved, doubt not our favour; nor will we for any assertions, lower thee in our thoughts until thou shalt return."

John beckoned him to depart as he finished speaking, and Albert was far too rejoiced to escape from so inhuman a power, to wait for a second bidding; he promptly made his obeisance without another word. He hurried to his apartment, and throwing himself on his bed, sought to compose his long-tortured feelings, with more soothing thoughts and happy hopes.

What a day had that indeed been—how varied the emotions which the retrospect brought to its remembrance—how strangely seemed the most important events to have been brought about—and when least expected, how suddenly had the happiest fortunes opened to him.

Mallet's aid so singularly secured, the Princess Eleanor's well-being, as also the invaluable co-operation arising from its knowledge, to-

gether with the general advancement of the cause, which had resulted from the occurrences of that one evening, seemed to mark it as the most fruitful, and at the same time, the most fortunate one of his difficult enterprise.

For, so far from his justly dreaded interview with the tyrant, having proved in its consequences any exception to the general good results of the day, it was, in fact, one of its most favourable features, and promised almost as happy effects as any.

The plans of the confederation now required that Albert should for some short time be absent from his post about the queen's person, and to bring this about had seemed so insurmountable a difficulty, that it had almost been decided that he should forego the advantages which his situation in the royal household afforded him, sooner than even incur the risk of being detained through the futile attempt to gain Isabella's sanction to his absence. The king's unlooked for mission, however, at once did away with the necessity of all explanation,

and gave him ample opportunity for fulfilling all the requisitions of his enterprise.

Nor would his temporary absence be felt, when so vigilant a spy as the Princess Eleanor was left to detect any sudden change in John's plans; her suggestion, indeed, was the assurance that he should succeed in his mission, for so plainly had she pointed out his course of proceeding, that he already saw there was no risk of any failure. And should he return successful, not only would he be restored to the tyrant's favour, but the indifference, where-with he had so far regarded him, might pass into a nearer patronage, and open to him more unlimited means of furthering his designs.

Such were some of the many thoughts that soothed Albert's trembling hesitation, and buoyed him up above the mere remembrance of the horrible trials he had that day undergone.

It was now past midnight, but he did not even seek to sleep; the thousand purposes of his mind, and the instant opening for his extreme and effective exertions, seemed to excite him beyond the very need of sleep.

Other thoughts too came in their turn ; fonder, dearer images at times cheated his more anxious inquiries ; and when he turned from them to the horrors of the past, and the difficulties and perplexities of the future, oh ! how bitterly did he curse that ambition, which had condemned him to the endurance of so cruel and perilous a banishment. How gladly would he have forgone those high claims and rights, in which the proudest soul might well have exulted, for the enjoyment of that better good, in which his heart alone rejoiced ; but those claims rested not with himself alone, other interests compelled him to proceed.

Nor was Laci altogether omitted in his various thoughts : his certain ruthless villany still irritated him with bitter indignation ; and despite the king's commands, and even more personal considerations, his rankling wrath sought to punish his treachery.

He was even now devising means for the wretch's chastisement, when he was disturbed by a low scratching sound near to his chamber door ; he had already been aware of it for some

time, but thinking it to be but a mouse gnawing the wainscot, he had taken no further notice. Now, however, it grew louder and louder, and its mere continuance to his jaded spirits was annoyance; he threw his slipper against the door, thinking to scare the intruder away, but the result was the reverse of that intended, the noise became louder instead of ceasing. The circumstance struck him as somewhat strange, and he instantly jumped up to see what occasioned it.

It was now nearly three o'clock, and quite dark, but as Albert had determined to set off on his errand at the earliest break of day, he had neither undressed, nor extinguished his lamp; going, therefore, softly to the door, he not only minutely examined the spot whence the noise seemed to issue, but listened, if by chance to gain some aural explanation of the mystery.

Presently he detected what he thought to be the purring of a cat, and thinking to get without the nuisance by letting the creature in, he unbolted his door.

The same instant he started back aghast ; by his faint taper's light, he beheld the dress and figure of the cursed Nym Jamy. Albert gave himself up as lost : he shrunk to the furthest corner of the apartment, and there stood trembling with horror.

The figure stole cautiously into the room, and after quietly re-bolting the door, advanced to where Albert stood.

END OF VOL. I.

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